

A Lapse ^{OF} MEMORY



Agnes Littlejohn

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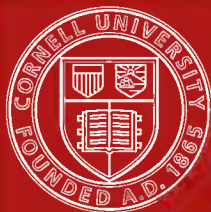
A lapse of memory, and other stories.



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A LAPSE OF MEMORY



STELLA

A LAPSE OF MEMORY

AND

OTHER STORIES

By Agnes Littlejohn

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Etc., Etc.

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Part I.

A LAPSE OF MEMORY

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

“What is wrong?” the young man asked hurriedly, putting his head out of the carriage window as the conveyance came suddenly to a standstill.

The driver had pulled his steaming horses almost on their flanks, and then sat listening with close attention to some distant sound. The evening was advanced, and they had been driving rapidly along the lonely high-road in the hope of reaching their destination ere it got late. For a moment there was no reply, and he impatiently repeated his enquiry. The man responded slowly in the French dialect, as spoken by the people in the South of France.

“A carriage was travelling ahead of us some time ago, Monsieur. I hear no more the sound of

distant wheels. I stopped because I heard a cry. And I desired to listen."

"Drive on!" said Herbert Lisle, with undiminished impatience. "If anything is wrong, we will find it out the sooner by being on the spot."

Jacques drove on along the dusky road, and soon they came in sight of a confused mass of dark objects struggling on the ground. A carriage had been upset, and the horses were entangled in the reins and traces. A light moved hither and thither like a will-o'-the-wisp.

Descending from the vehicle, Lisle advanced with hasty steps. He heard a voice crying faintly for help, and went over to the door of the upset conveyance. Opening it with some difficulty, he found inside a woman, and another—apparently lifeless—form.

"Help me!" a girl's voice cried in English, in accents of alarm. "My grandfather is hurt—he does not move or speak!"

"Do not worry!" Lisle responded cheerily. "We will do all we can for you."

As he spoke he helped her out. With Jacques' help he got the unconscious man out of the broken carriage, and laid him on the turf. They carefully examined him by the light of a carriage

lamp. As the uncertain light fell flickeringly on his face the girl made a quick movement forward. Kneeling by him, she bent over him with deep anxiety, and Lisle produced his brandy flask and handed it to her. At length the old man unclosed his eyes with a deep sigh, a look of terror, and of intense pain.

“Where are you hurt?” Lisle questioned anxiously. “Tell me, that I may try to ease your sufferings.”

For a moment the old man tried in vain to speak. At last, with supreme effort, he uttered brokenly a few disjointed murmured syllables. But they could only catch the few words:—

“Papers—packet—business to-night——”

The harsh strange voice trailed off in broken murmurs, and his meaning passed them by. He saw that he was not understood. With an imploring look upward at the girl, one last vain and anguished effort to articulate, he gave a painful gasp for breath, and relapsed once more into a merciful oblivion; though there were signs that he was still alive.

The girl turned up her face appealingly to Lisle, with unconcealed anxiety depicted in her look.

"I will take you on with me," he said quickly, answering her look. "There is still a mile or so to go before we can reach the nearest house."

"Oh, please make haste!" she answered nervously, with a hard effort to control herself.

Lisle called to Jacques, who had been helping the coachman with his horses, and they lifted the old man into the carriage as gently as might be. Then they went on as fast as possible.

There was much stir and bustle at the house, where they at length arrived. Word went quickly round from mouth to mouth of an accident on the road. A room was soon made ready, and a doctor called in to attend the sufferer. Meantime Lisle took the girl apart.

As he was returning to rejoin the doctor, that gentleman came forth from the sick-room, gently closing the door behind him. He beckoned Lisle aside in the ill-lighted passage.

"'Mon Dieu!' It is not much I can do for him. It is a question of time. But one must not lose hope."

"As long as there is life, there is hope!" said Lisle. "Is he badly injured?"

"But yes. He probably received some shock in the break-down."

"Can you say how he is hurt?"

"He has no external injury. At his age, this must have long been hanging over him. 'Mon Dieu!' The wonder is it had held off so long."

"What is the nature of his injury?"

"'Mon ami,' he was old, and very frail. Too old and feeble to withstand the shock. The old man's heart is very very weak."

"How long before——"

Lisle hesitated painfully, unable to finish the sentence on his lips.

"'Mon ami,' it is impossible to say. His heart, it is worn out. A few weeks or days. Perhaps but a few hours. What would you? The latter were more merciful."

"Is anyone attending him?"

"Yes. I have left a nurse with him. Keep the young girl away from him to-night. I will see the patient later. But one must be reasonable. It is little I can do."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders as he spoke, and turned hurriedly to go. Lisle returned to the dimly-lighted room, where the girl sat anxiously awaiting him.

"We can do nothing more to-night," he said. "A room has been prepared for you."

"Oh, I cannot sleep," she answered drearily.
"I must be with my grandfather."

"The doctor has forbidden it. He has a nurse.
It is late; they have all gone to bed."

She looked at him with quivering lips, without reply.

"I will do all I can, rely on me. My name is Herbert Lisle. May I ask yours?"

"My name is Stella Verne."

The young man thought it suited her refined, well-bred appearance. Her slightly-foreign accent gave her speech a touch of charm.

"Mr. Lisle, there is a favour I must ask of you," Miss Verne said urgently. "Will you secure my grandfather's private papers?"

"I have already seen to that. I will give them to you first thing in the morning."

"Thank you!" Miss Verne said gratefully, with a shy glance of gratitude from soft dark eyes that matched with her pretty hair.

She turned to follow the woman who had come to fetch her to her room.

Early next day Lisle met the doctor leaving, and learnt from him that Mr. Verne was still in the same state. Miss Verne was with him now.

"Take her out in the fresh air," the doctor said. "She can do no good in there. I have already said it. The old man is too ill to speak. He does not rightly know her."

At Lisle's request Miss Verne soon joined him in a private room. She looked pale and spiritless. Drawing a chair up to a table for her, he brought forth her grandfather's papers, silently placing them before her on the table. She pushed them from her with an impatient gesture.

"This, then, was the terror that was hanging over him," she said unsteadily. "He hinted at it to me on our way. He visited a doctor in the city, just before we left."

She paused, with much emotion.

"There was some urgent private business my grandfather meant to execute," Miss Verne went on, "when he insisted on hurrying on at night; and meeting with this accident on the road, he got the shock which caused, or hastened on, his illness."

"May I ask where you were going?"

"I do not know myself. Grandfather did not tell me. I think he had directions to find out some stranger here on a matter of business."

"What are your grounds for this belief?"

"Some talk that passed between us on our jour-

ney. I begged him not to hurry—he was looking ill. I entreated him to rest. ‘No,’ he said, impatiently, ‘I must go on to-night. You do not know the importance of my business, my poor Stella. Do not try to stay me. I must not lose time—it may be all too short at best,’ he added with repressed, but strangely-impotent yearning in his trembling tones and in his face. ‘It would only make a difference of a few hours,’ I said. ‘There is a man whom I must see to-night,’ was his reply. ‘Stella! there is a terror hanging over me—each moment brings it nearer—I must see this man before it falls on me.’ ”

Miss Verne turned to the papers now. Lisle waited patiently whilst she examined them. After a careful, long inspection of them, she looked up at him with a deeply-perplexed, surprised expression on her face.

“There are seemingly no signs,” she said, “by which I can learn this urgent business.”

Lisle sat hesitating, drumming on the table with his fingers.

“If I might offer you my help,” he said at last.

She turned to him at once, and, without remark, returned the papers to him.

“Am I to look at these?” he questioned quietly.

She inclined her head assentingly. "I can trust you, Mr. Lisle."

Lisle felt real pleasure at her tone of implied confidence in him. It made his task, self-undertaken as it was, so much the easier for both of them, he thought. He proceeded to examine the documents.

Mr. Verne has about one hundred pounds in bank-notes here. But apparently no personal letters, or anything to guide us—no address of any kind to give us a possible clue."

"My grandfather had a habit," said Miss Verne perplexedly, "of destroying all the letters he received, when he had answered them—though, indeed, they were but few. And I do not know his business in this, or any other, country. Or even his intentions with regard to me."

Lisle sat silent, pondering. Then he turned to her again.

"May I take the liberty of asking you some questions?"

"Ask me anything you wish," she returned despairingly; "for you are my only friend."

"Then tell me all you can about yourself and Mr. Verne."

"I have not much to tell," she answered, with a dreary little sigh. "I know next to

nothing of myself. I was brought up in England in a quiet country-house, educated by the cultured lady in whose charge I was. Our home was isolated; we lived a retired life; I made no friends. Of my parents I know nothing. It was a topic which my grandfather would not at any time discuss with me. He lived on the Continent till Mrs. Thorburn died, when he came to take me back with him. We spent our time in travelling from place to place. Grandfather was extremely quiet and taciturn with me. He had been so accustomed to an independent, solitary life, that he never seemed to get quite used to me as his companion."

"He kept you, then, in ignorance of your own life affairs?"

"In complete ignorance."

"Incomprehensible and strange, it seems to me. This bulky, heavily-sealed packet might perhaps contain the clue to the mystery."

"It is addressed to someone, seemingly," Miss Verne objected. "We have no right to open that."

"It is merely marked 'Mr. C.,'" said Lisle. "That, I think, is merely a note for your grandfather himself. And it does not assist us."

He paused, frowning thoughtfully. He was re-

flecting to himself with deep dissatisfaction as he turned the packet over in his hands.

“As it is so heavily sealed, no doubt it contains some treasure of great value.”

As Lisle spoke, by chance he turned his head towards the open window. To his astonishment, he gazed straight into the eyes belonging to the pale and evil-looking face of a man who had apparently been for some time closely watching them from without; half-concealed by the flowering creeper growing there. With a quick and greedy glance at the packet in Lisle's hands, the man's face disappeared, just as Miss Verne, who sat with her back to the window, turned, surprised, to see what Lisle was so intently gazing at.

“Some inquisitive serving-man,” he said carelessly; and thought no more of it.

He became immersed in speculative thought. His faint hope had grown fainter with each answer, and at last it died away. He could only grasp the fact that Miss Verne was friendless, and, so far as he could see, not specially fitted to cope alone with the world. He now began to feel uneasy for her near future, and to think he was in some measure responsible for helping her. But he had time to spare, and determined to remain until he had seen her safely through her troubles.

CHAPTER II.

“Monsieur Verne does not improve in health,” the doctor said one day to Lisle. “‘Eh bien,’ it is understood. He is beyond my skill. I entertain the gravest doubts of his recovery. Also, of his chance of living long.”

“I have made all possible inquiries in the neighbourhood,” Lisle responded anxiously, “to discover if he was expected by any person here. But I can learn nothing further. Mr. Verne is apparently unknown to any of the people here. Doctor! I am perplexed as to what course we can pursue to help Miss Verne, if he should die.”

The old doctor turned and looked at him with a perplexed expression.

“Is it possible that Monsieur does not know? Already have the people been busy with their tongues. You have been much with Mademoiselle. If Monsieur Verne should die——”

He paused here meaningly. Lisle started, and looked at him with surprised concern.

“You are already interested in Mademoiselle?” the doctor suggested shrewdly, with a slight smile.

Then, after a pause, during which his eyes were not unkindly fixed upon Lisle’s brooding face, he added with slow emphasis—

“‘Mon ami,’ why not marry? Me, I would solve the problem thus. And for the benefit of Mademoiselle. It is of fortune good you should be here. She will not be alone—is it not? ‘Mon ami,’ you hesitate. It is of compliment the highest. And it now is necessary. You are a man of honour. You will silence the busy tongues. Me, I would not hesitate in such a case.”

Lisle still looked disturbed as the possibility was thus pressed on him.

“Ah! you English people—you are slow. You have the British phlegm,” the little doctor said resignedly. “I should go into a rapture. Mademoiselle is of appearance charming. ‘Dieu,’ what eyes and hair. And of complexion perfect. One should appreciate. Monsieur permits that I advise him in the matter? But yes, it would certainly be best to make the marriage, for the sake of Mademoiselle!”

Lisle continued to look thoughtfully at his animated face, but still without reply.

“It is well it were done soon,” said the fussy

little doctor finally, as he went off. "The suffering old man will not last long. No. My skill can do no more for him."

Lisle suggested later to Miss Verne that they should take a stroll in the fresh air. It was a lovely morning for a walk. As they came out together, flocks of cooing pigeons and white doves preened their plumage on the roofs, or were flying gaily about in the warm golden sunshine, and fluttering round the gables. A saddled horse was leisurely drinking at a wooden trough by the roadside, with a boy upon its back, and a dog or two lay blinking lazily near by in the warm sun.

The youngster turned his head to gaze at them, a look of curiosity in his round eyes. Two women standing at an open door across the road were whispering together, glancing at them as they passed. Stella passed on unconscious of their meaning looks, but the colour rose hotly to Lisle's brown cheek. He turned his burning face away from his companion.

They had gone some way before he broke the silence

"Miss Verne, I asked you to come out with me that I might talk with you quite free from interruption." After pausing a moment in embarrassment, he added, "Stella, will you marry me?"

The girl started, much astonished, flushing vividly, and looking at him in bewilderment. The idea of what lay in his mind had not occurred to her. He answered her wondering look by taking her hand in his. His own embarrassment had left him now at sight of hers.

"I must speak plainly to you, Stella. Forgive me if I seem cruel or abrupt. Your grandfather cannot recover—he is actually dying now. The doctor tells me that there is no hope for him. I ask for the right to protect you. I wish to marry you, and take you to my home."

She did not answer him. She had not withdrawn her hand from his clasp, however, and Lisle was glad of that.

"Do I hurry you unduly?" he asked pleadingly. "There is no other way. Here, you have no friend but me."

"I do not love you; and you cannot care for me," objected Stella, flushing, her eyes bent on the ground. "You have not known me long."

"But you like me, and I like you. We will soon learn to care for one another. The fact is, Stella, the people here are talking—I have it from the doctor—we must stop the busy tongues. For my sake, as well as yours, I ask this thing of you. On all accounts it is best for us to marry now."

"What about your friends?" she faltered doubtfully, an ever-deepening colour in her fresh cheeks.

"You have none," he answered quietly, "either to approve or interfere—no more have I."

"I do not know where to turn," she said uneasily, "or where to go. I have no claim on anyone."

"You have a claim on me! Can you trust me with your life and happiness?"

"I think I can," said Stella, shyly.

At this Lisle smiled, well pleased. He felt the protective instinct stirring in his breast.

"You must give me unquestioning trust," he exclaimed, with a masterfulness that was as sweet as it was strange and new to him.

He impetuously possessed himself of both her hands, and drew her nearer to him.

"Promise always to have faith in me," he exclaimed, with a faint touch of pre-vision in his soul that perhaps in the unknown future, a time might chance to come when he would be glad to claim of her the fulfilment of this promise.

"I promise," she responded timidly.

"Thank you, Stella."

Lisle vowed in his soul that she should have good cause to trust him ever.

Their wedding-day was shadowed. Even as they were returning to the house, a messenger met them hurriedly, to tell them that a sudden change for the worse had taken place whilst they were absent from the house, and Mr. Verne was dying. They pressed on as fast as possible, and hurried in. They were too late, however. Mr. Verne had passed away as they were entering.

A few days later Mr. and Mrs. Lisle were on their way to the town, whence they intended starting for their home.

The distance thither seemed greater than they had surmised, or else the driver had made some miscalculation of the time required for travelling. The evening was coming on apace, and they had long since passed the last available resting-place, when Jacques stopped suddenly.

“A portion of the harness has given way, Monsieur,” he said anxiously in French, as he got down and examined it with a puzzled shake of his head. “It has been cut. The constant strain on it has done the rest.”

He paused to look at it again. Once more he slowly shook his head.

"It is past the comprehension. It was uninjured when I put it on the horse. Monsieur sees the harness has not been much worn."

"Did you attend to it yourself?"

"Yes, Monsieur. One of the men approached when I mounted to the box. He tightened a strap or two. He said a buckle was undone. I am not apt to slur my work!"

Jacques' nimble fingers, as he spoke, were working busily. He repaired the injured harness in a rough and ready fashion, but it was not well secured, and necessitated driving cautiously. Moreover, they had met with a fresh misfortune now. The horse had fallen lame. Since sundown, too, it had turned out an unexpectedly chilly evening, with a decided tendency to drizzle.

The driver stopped again, and got down stiffly, with slow tardiness, to light the lamps. He came in fresh dismay, to the near side of the carriage, to consult with Lisle.

"Monsieur, we must rest. The horse is lame. Monsieur sees he cannot make the pace. The harness is uncertain. Me, I can repair it. But I must have time and light. And I must take it off. Then the horse. Some trouble ails his shoe. It retards the progress. He stumbles at each step."

"How far distant is the nearest house?" Lisle questioned wearily.

"We could arrive at one. But no. It is late to make the demand for a night's rest."

"Let us go there. Why do you hesitate? Drive on!" Lisle exclaimed impatiently.

"Monsieur would think of nothing, know nothing! And this so dark night. But ah, the place. It is deserted. One must have the knowledge. To go there is not best."

He glanced uneasily across his shoulder, as he crossed himself, ere adding in a lower tone——

"It has the evil name, Monsieur!"

"Nonsense!" Lisle exclaimed impatiently, with growing annoyance, as he thought of the uncomplaining weariness of his young wife. "It will at least be warmer there than here," he said to Stella, "and we shall be under shelter for the night."

"No slight consideration, when there is a storm at hand," said Stella. "Anything is better than standing still in this increasing chilly drizzle."

"Yes," Lisle agreed; "it cannot be more comfortable than this."

Jacques still hesitated; shrugged his shoulders; rubbed his chin in a perplexed, vexed way.

"If Monsieur would permit the advice from me. Monsieur, you will. Is it not?"

"Come, Jacques, drive on! We cannot stay fooling here all night. The horse is shivering with cold. You say, yourself, there is nowhere else to go."

Shrugging his shoulders as he muttered to himself, with increasing tardiness of movement, the unwilling man went to his horse's head to lead him.

"Monsieur has his way. He will repent. 'Dieu,' what a night!"

Meantime, Lisle and Stella had alighted from the carriage. After walking a short distance, stumbling in the dusk, they turned aside into a neglected road that was evidently little used. Just as they began to fear that they had missed their way, a dark mass of trees and building loomed before them in the dusky silence of the night. Jacques stopped his wearied horse and went unwillingly to open the old crazy gate that led into the drive. "The rotten fastenings gave way before his touch, and he led the tired horse through to the house-front, and halted there.

It was closed up and dark, and appeared inhospitable and forbidding. Some of the windows were partially grown over with creeper, or were in dense

shadow from the close and heavy growth of an old tree. Lisle knocked gently at a door, but no response was made. After a long interval of waiting, during which he continued to knock more loudly and repeatedly from time to time, he was on the point of abandoning all hope that any inmate could be within this dreary and apparently deserted building.

“Monsieur permits that I attempt?” Jacques asked wearily at last.

“What could you do?” demanded Lisle.

“But yes, Monsieur. Me, I will force a door or window for the entrance.”

“Wait a little yet. I think someone is stirring now.”

Lisle stepped back as he spoke, and looking up at the desolate and silent house, discerned a faint light at a window above. Soon the light was slowly moved from room to room, and from one landing to another. The faint glimmering appeared now at one window, now at another; now clearer, and now fainter, and by degrees it so descended to the lower floor. Then came the sound of a light footfall just within. And presently the heavy clanking of a rusty chain. Soon the door swung open slowly, and it seemed reluctantly, to disclose the unexpected figure of an old woman standing on the threshold.

By the brief glance Lisle got, he noticed that her face wore an inscrutable expression. She carried in her hand a dim and smoking lamp, which she raised up so that its light fell full upon his face, but left her own in shadow.

“Can we remain here for the night?” Lisle asked in French. “We have been belated, and will pay you well, if we may have food and shelter for the night.”

“‘Entrez, Monsieur,’ We live here alone, my son and I. If little will content, we can afford you the night’s shelter.”

In answer to enquiry as to accommodation for the tired horse, she stepped outside the door and pointed in the direction of the stables, at some distance from the house itself. Thither Jacques took round the vehicle without delay.

They entered the old house and passed into a room. It was close and musty, as though it had been long shut up, and it was furnished with quaint, dingy, and worm-eaten furniture. A faded, heavy curtain hung before the door, perhaps to keep out draught.

Stella gave an irrepressible and nervous little shudder, as though the silent loneliness of this strange place had already had effect upon her wearied nerves.

The old woman placed the smoking lamp upon the table, uttering a few disjointed words in French, regarding food and firing, and then left the room. She re-entered presently with fuel. A fire was lighted and was soon burning cheerfully on the roomy, open hearth. She received Lisle's request that she would supply Jacques' wants, and retired with a few words indicating her intention of providing them with some refreshment.

The old woman soon returned, bringing food, and a jug of hot and steaming coffee. As she turned to leave the room again she hesitated, with her eyes fixed on Lisle's face as though she fain would speak. Then she seemed to shrink within herself, and a look of terror came upon her wrinkled face. In another instant it was gone again, and Lisle thought it was perhaps but some slight flickering movement of the firelight across her face. Even as he looked at her in doubt, she turned and left the room.

He and Stella now sat down together to partake of their belated supper. The fire was cheerful, and the hot coffee would have been acceptable to the cold and weary travellers, but for a strange, slightly unpleasant flavour. After a slight repast they drew up their seats beside the brightly-burning fire.

It threw strange shadows in the gloomy corners of the room.

"The coffee had a strange taste, Stella," Lisle said presently.

"I have scarcely touched it," Stella said.

There was a long silence, during which they followed each their own reflections.

"I wonder," she said musingly, at last, "if we will succeed in finding out the person for whom my poor grandfather's sealed packet was intended? I have been thinking constantly about it. Perhaps we may yet have to open it."

As Stella spoke she turned her head towards the door.

"What is the matter, Stella?" Lisle inquired a moment later, observing her abstracted manner. He had drawn the packet from his inner pocket, and was thoughtfully handling it.

She did not reply. Yawning wearily, he leant back in his seat. He felt a strange, unwonted drowsiness gradually stealing over him, and he vainly tried to shake it off. It steadily increased its heavy hold. He fell presently into a dreamy state, and then into a doze.

Stella roused him suddenly by catching at his arm, with a subdued but startled exclamation. He

started, turning to her, for the moment almost shaking off the heavy slumber stealing over him.

“Did you hear anything?” she whispered, awed. “I heard a slight noise near, as though there were some unseen presence in the heavy shadow of the curtain at the door. Then I cried out to you.”

“A mere fancy,” Lisle responded carelessly, as he replaced the packet in his inner pocket. “There is no one there. You are tired and nervous, and imagined it,” he added, rising heavily from his seat.

He went first to the door, and then looked round the room.

“The fire throws strange flickering shadows here. It is beginning to die out, and we shall have no fuel to replenish it when I have put on this last log. I feel strangely drowsy—I must sleep it off!”

As Lisle spoke he made a vain attempt to throw the window open. The creeper just outside it had overgrown the casement, and made it impracticable. In his efforts to open it, he broke a pane of glass, and the cold night air, smelling of freshly-fallen rain, rushed in. For the moment, it almost dispelled the stupor that was stealing over him and deadening his senses.

By this time the lamp was burning low, and before he turned it out, Lisle made Stella a couch

as best he could, on an old settle, with the help of a travelling cloak. He tried to secure the door, but found the lock was broken, and the catch unusable. Tired out himself, he drew his seat close to the dying fire, and, leaning his arms heavily on the table, laid his weary head on them.

“I must rest awhile.” he murmured drowsily, and fell asleep at once.

CHAPTER III.

Stella could not sleep. She lay listening and thinking in the dark and silent watches of the night. The fire had burnt out, and only a few hot cinders lay upon the hearth. But Lisle was sleeping heavily, leaning forward on the table in unconscious stupor. There was no sound throughout the silent and mysterious house, beyond his heavy breathing in the room.

Meantime the first fine drizzling of the rain had become a cutting, sharper shower; the sharper shower became first a steady and monotonous patterning, and then a heavy downpour. A souging wind sprang up and wailed around the desolate old house like some unhappy, miserable spirit. It soon increased in fury, in short, violent gusts, and the rain descended heavily in unremitting torrents. The monotonous chanting of the wind soon became a shrieking shrill. A raging thunderstorm had been slowly gathering, and now had broken over them with a violent burst of wind.

The thunder peals grew louder, nearer, every

moment; the vivid lightning flashes more intense. The wind howled on, with mighty blasts at times that seemed to shake the solid, stone-built house. Now sinking into moaning, murmuring sound, and for the moment almost dying away.

The wind was howling still, with occasional lulls of this low, dull murmuring. The rain still beat down heavily, and the vivid flashes of lightning ceased not, save for a brief interval. The thunder rolled and crashed incessantly, or growled itself away into far-distant regions, as the fitful lightning-flashes lighted up from time to time, now brightly, and now dimly, the apartment, through the heavily-creeped window.

About midnight Stella started from a fitful doze into which she had sunk from sheer fatigue, in spite of the wild tumult of the warring elements. And during one of these brief flashes she was startled to observe a dark form standing by her husband, bending over him. Instantly on the alert, she started up, with the one thought of saving him from danger. With one swift movement she reached his side as he stirred restlessly. And as he moved, the intruder raised a hand and arm to strike. Stella caught the downward stroke on her own arm.

Roused by her sudden cry of pain and warning, mingling strangely with the storm, Lisle started up

in time to see, by a lightning-flash, a pale and evil-looking face as it turned fiercely on his wife.

His thoughts flew swiftly to the time when he had seen it last, as it looked in at him from an open window, half-concealed by a gay flowering creeper. Then he thought of the cut harness on the road, and the lamed horse. Was robbery the object? Was it possible their misadventure on the road had been contrived and timed, that they might be forced to seek this lonely lair for their night's shelter?

With the speed of the lightning-flash itself these thoughts flashed through his mind in a connected train.

The intruder had wheeled round as Lisle sprang up, and, flying from the room, Lisle and his young wife were left alone together in the close grim darkness, awaiting the next tardy lightning-flash.

"How heavily I have slept," Lisle murmured, with a misty, half-awakened recollection of the evening's occurrences; as, refreshed by sleep, he shook off his remaining touch of drowsiness. "I could almost think the coffee was drugged," he reflected uneasily.

He drew his matches from his pocket, and put the half-charred sticks together on the hearth, and, kneeling, lighted them. Now thoroughly roused,

his first act was hastily to draw a heavy piece of furniture against the door, to guard against a fresh surprise. Then he turned to Stella, who was sitting on the settle, white and faint, and waiting patiently, her arm bleeding freely from an ugly wound on it. Lisle uttered an exclamation, of distressed concern. On careful examination, to his intense relief, he found it was apparently not dangerous, though painful; and the scar of it, when healed, would probably remain to her dying day.

He checked the bleeding, and bound up the wound with careful tenderness. Making her lie down again, he sat beside her, now prepared to watch for the remainder of the night.

The sounds of the storm had grown much fainter now, and it was dying away. The thunder peals were lulling; the lightning flashes had become less frequent, less intense, and gradually ceased. The beating of the rain became less violent, grew once again into a monotonous gentle patter-ing, a soothing lullaby. The storm had passed on and away, or had dropped, worn out; for it died away at last into complete unbroken silence.

Stella had sunk meantime into light and fitful sleep. Lisle was greatly touched, stirred to his in-most depths. He watched her slumbers by the flick-

ering firelight, very tenderly; and bending over her he gently pressed his lips on the pretty rounded arm hurt in his own defence.

The fire died out again, and he watched for the first faint light of dawn. As the day at last began to break (a change of cool, grey light that he could only just discern within this creeper-darkened room), he approached the broken window, and hearkened eagerly for the sound of coming wheels without. But as yet he could hear nothing.

Stella now awoke, and he came quickly to her side.

"Then it was not all a dream?" she exclaimed in a low voice, gazing around her wonderingly. "I almost fancied that it was, Bertie! What a strange night we have had! And what a dreadful storm!"

Lisle knelt beside her, gathering her close to him, with an impulsive movement.

"Stella! Do you realise you have been hurt for me—perhaps have saved my life?"

"Oh, I am so glad—so glad I was in time!"

The girl half raised herself. Lisle imperiously took her back again in his embrace.

"You are doubly mine now, Stella," he said masterfully. "Do not turn your face away from me!"

He bent his head; his warm lips sought her cheek.

"I could almost think there was a put-up plan to rob us," he said presently. "I think the old woman was half inclined to warn us of some evil when she seemed about to speak. You were probably not mistaken, after all, when you thought that some one was watching us last night."

"What shall we do? Shall we leave quietly when Jacques comes round for us?"

"Why, yes; I told him to come round at day-break. It would be useless to seek any knowledge of this house. Though the night's occurrences have been unusual, to say the least. But this is an unusual place."

As Lisle spoke he heard at last the welcome sound of wheels passing along the weedy drive, and stopping just outside. The house was still and silent. They could only hear the restless stamping of the horse's hoofs outside. All below was as it had been on the previous evening. The fire had long ago died out again, and the charred wood and ashes lay in dusty heaps on the cold and cheerless hearth. The remains of their scanty, uninviting supper lay before them on the table. Lisle placed money there to defray the cost of their night's lodging; with a

slight smile on his lips at the grim irony of it, disturbed and broken as their rest had been. Unfastening the clanking, rusty chain, with an involuntary shudder at the harsh noise it made, grating on his nerves after his disturbed night, he opened the heavy door. It grated dismally on its hinges, awakening the echoes of the house, breaking the prevailing mysterious silence brooding over it.

Lisle took Stella out, and placed her in the carriage. Ere getting in himself, he stood gazing round him, in the misty morning light. The air out here, though raw and chill, was free and healthy after the unwholesome closeness of the house. The house looked desolate in the gray morning light. No signs of life were here. No smoke issued from the old, blackened chimneys. An over-grown, neglected orchard stretched away on one side. Some broken branches lay strewn about, tossed there in its cruel sport by the storm the night before. A tree had been uprooted and thrown down.

Lisle got into the carriage, drawing a long breath of intense relief.

"Now for the next portion of our journey home," he exclaimed with a glad look, as he pressed Stella's hand, and drew the wraps about her carefully.

They set forward for the town whence they would make their start.

CHAPTER IV.

On the evening of a dull, gray day, Lisle and his young wife arrived together at their home in Devonshire.

As their carriage stopped before the handsome country house, standing amidst ample and well-kept grounds, the front door was opened by a middle-aged man, whose naturally solemn countenance wore a look of sedate joy. He descended the flight of steps to open the carriage door.

“Ah, John I am glad to see you; glad to be at home once more!” cried Lisle.

“The house is ready for you, sir. We worked hard to get things ready when we got your telegram.”

An old woman, neatly, even handsomely and becomingly attired in black, appeared on the threshold of the door. Lisle, ascending the flight of steps with Stella on his arm, approached her smiling, and shook hands with her affectionately. Then he presented Stella.

“Well, Grayson! here we are. You see we have arrived all safe and sound. This is your new mistress. Stella, this is Mrs. Grayson, my old house-keeper. My warm, true friend, and my most ardent admirer since my schoolboy days.”

Lisle spoke gaily, laughing happily. Mrs. Grayson, who had cast an astonished, startled look at the strange young woman who was thus suddenly presented to her notice, observed her at first with ill-concealed dismay. One close glance at Stella's winsome face disarmed her uneasiness. A smile broke forth like sunshine on her wrinkled countenance. Re-assured, she respectfully advanced to take the trembling little hand held forth to her. A sort of motherly compassion came into her face as she felt the nervous fluttering of Stella's fingers. The old woman longed to stoop and kiss the little hand. and bid her mistress welcome.

But Stella had observed the momentary shadow on the old woman's brow, and a sudden tinge of pride and pain shot through her heart as she began to realise her strange position here.

“Mr. Herbert, I am glad and thankful you have come!” said Mrs. Grayson, beaming with delight.

"Yet you will not let me enter my own house!" laughed Lisle.

She moved aside at once, and led the way. Lisle turned lightly to his wife to lead her in.

"Enter, Stella! Let me introduce you to your home! Come into the library, my favourite room. I know we shall find a good fire burning there!"

They entered the room, and he helped the nervous, trembling girl to remove her wraps. Then he drew her closely to him, with a gravely-tender face.

"Your own home, Stella—yours and mine!" he said. "Why, how you tremble, dear!"

He bent his head and gently kissed her lips.

"What is the matter? Why, how cold you are! I fear you must be tired out, travelling."

So pre-occupied was Lisle with his own thoughts that no idea of the truth occurred to him. That Stella could feel in any way amiss had never crossed his mind. For was she not his wife, and mistress of his home?

"To-morrow," Lisle said, happily, "we will view the house and grounds together. You shall have all arranged to your own taste. How happy we shall be!"

But the girl made no response; and, chilled by her seeming coldness, and not understanding it,

Lisle released her somewhat from his hold, with a hurt feeling at his heart.

Stella glanced hastily at him, and the colour for a moment left her face. But the early, stinging smart recurred to her, and still her heart was quivering and aching with the pain. Fearing to show it, she put her husband gently from her, and walked over to the fireplace. The young husband quickly followed her, with a reproachful, almost a resentful look.

“Stella, how cold you are to me! You do not care, as I already care for you. Else this would come more naturally to you now.”

She gave him a quick look of mingled shyness and compunction.

“Do not be vexed with me,” she said. “Bertie, it is still new to me. And I feel very strange.”

“Can I be angry with you, Stella? Though I think that I am hurt. But I must not be impatient—you will learn. We are married now, remember. These things should come more naturally to you by my side. You will soon find it easy. You are tired out travelling.”

Stella did not answer. Lisle observed her for an instant with some new uneasy feeling in his mind that he could not have put into words. It had sud-

denly occurred to him how little he knew women.

In an altered tone he said:

“Will you go to your own room with Mrs. Grayson whilst I speak to John before we dine? I will ring for her.”

As Stella turned to leave him, a sudden sense of loneliness came over her. She felt her need of him. She turned quickly back to him again. With an impulsive gesture she put her arms about him, and clung gently to him. In an instant Lisle had caught her to his breast.

“Stella! Stella! do you begin to care?”

She made no reply, and he gently raised her face to look at it. It was all flushed and quivering, and her eyes were full of tears. The young husband was both puzzled and concerned. He bent his head to hers, and kissed the tears away.

“Dear! what troubles you?” he whispered tenderly.

“Bertie, it swept over me with one wild, overwhelming rush, that I am but an unknown stranger in your home. I have no friends—no rights—and then——”

She stopped short, battling to keep back a sudden rush of tears.

The old housekeeper's first uneasy look of a great astonishment, the wondering surprise depicted on the stolid face of the serving-man when he opened the carriage-door, came freshly back to her.

"But then, my home is yours! Is it not enough to be with me?" Lisle murmured tenderly, and half reproachfully. "Stella, we will talk of this again together. We must prepare for dinner now. And I must speak with John."

He patted her shoulder, smiling cheerfully, and dismissed her to her room.

As they finished dinner, John approached his master with a letter.

"What is this?" ejaculated Lisle. "I have barely time to arrive most unexpectedly at home after a long absence, and, behold! a letter has already come for me."

He opened and read it with evident annoyance.

"It is from Mr. Weston, Stella, my solicitor. It seems he saw our carriage passing from the station, and knows I have arrived. He will call to-night. I had looked forward to a quiet evening alone with you. Our first evening at home! I have so much to say to you."

They retired together to the library. Lisle's face was full of thought.

"Stella, will you spend half an hour with Mrs. Grayson when he comes? I have important private business to transact with him. And I would like to introduce you afterwards. Return to the library in half an hour's time."

A sharp peal rang at the front-door bell.

"That is Mr. Weston's summons," Lisle said, half pleased and half reluctant, as he prepared to receive his friend.

Leading Stella to the staircase, he dismissed her there, and stood looking after her slight figure till it vanished from his view.

What followed later, after the immediate departure of the unwished-for visitor, was only known to Lisle himself and his young wife.

And it was rather late that night when Lisle prepared to ascend the staircase on his way to bed. Light in hand, he entered the spacious and luxuriously-fitted room that had been prepared for them. The bed-curtains were drawn, and setting down his light, he went softly, eagerly across to see if Stella were awake. His whole soul was yearning for a thorough explanation before he slept that night.

Drawing aside the curtains, he bent over tenderly. He started suddenly, and gave a quick and apprehensive glance around the room. The bed pos-

sessed no tenant! It had not been touched. And the room itself was empty and unoccupied, save for himself.

He caught up the light again, and held it high. As he did so, a letter lying on the dressing-table caught his eye. Lisle seized on it with shaking hands, a cruel fear gripping at his heart; and tore it open.

His young face grew white as he glanced over it. With one furious, despairing gesture, he tore it across, and flung the pieces from him on the ground.

"My wife has abandoned me!" he cried, and his voice was hoarse with bitterness and pain. "And I know not whither she has gone!"



Part II.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

“No friend to welcome me at any port,” Lisle muttered with a sigh, as he stood leaning against the railing of the steamer’s upper deck.

She had been steaming towards the entrance of the harbour of Colombo, and the beautiful palm-fringed shore was now in view. As she dropped anchor, she was surrounded by some boats, many of them bringing native merchants laden with Oriental treasures, some with dusky Tamils who sang to the splash of their oars, plying for the hire of their boats to take passengers ashore; and others yet, containing friends of the passengers. Lisle had watched their eager greetings with this exclamation, a sad feeling at his heart. His eyes grew dreamy as he watched the busy scene, and he fell into sad train of thought, from which he presently roused himself with a determined shake of his broad shoulders.

"I will go below," he said, "and get my traps together. It is time I went ashore. No use in lingering here!"

He was about to turn away when a friendly hand was laid on his shoulder, as a once well-known voice said heartily,—

"A warm welcome to Colombo, Lisle! So we meet again at last!"

Lisle turned hastily towards the man who had thus accosted him.

"Mainwaring, is it you? How came you here? And how did you know I was on board this ship?"

"No thanks to you, my friend, with your cool neglect of me. Knowing what a traveller you are, I kept my eye on the shipping-lists, and came upon your name at last. I felt sure it was you, and came to give you welcome."

Lisle gave him a look of gratitude, and grasped his hand again.

"I am so glad to see you, Norman! How has the world been using you?"

"Oh, my world wags on much as usual anywhere," returned the other lightly.

"You have not told me yet why you are here?"

"I was over-worked in business, and was sent

out awhile for a holiday, that I might recuperate. My mother came with me. I feel much better now. But, Lisle, you have a melancholy air you did not have before!"

For a moment the two men stood silently regarding one another with anxious interest. Mainwaring marked, with pained surprise, the subtle changes that had come in Lisle's well-remembered countenance.

His face was that of a man who had endured some bitter disappointment, some keen grief or sharp anxieties. His fine, dark eyes had a weary and listless look, and the curves about his firm and finely-moulded mouth betokened habitual sadness. His dark hair was already slightly tinged with gray.

With a sudden kindly impulse, Mainwaring put his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder.

"Well, Lisle, I have come to take you home with me. We have a charming little bungalow. I will take no denial, and my mother is already expecting you. I suppose there is nothing to keep you here? Then we had better get ashore without delay. I have a boat."

They were soon seated in the boat, rowed by a dusky Tamil, and approaching the palm-fringed shore.

"I will give directions about my baggage later on. I am in doubt where to stay," said Lisle.

"Stay at Galle Face," suggested Mainwaring. "The Carruthers, friends of mine, are staying there. And the scenery is delightful."

As they came ashore, Lisle saw Indian humped-bulls drawing curious palm-thatched carts; dusky Tamil and Singhalese coolies with their busy tongues; and parties of Europeans in their large sun-topes, and travellers from the liners in the harbour, coming and going in carriages and 'rickshaws.

A young Englishman, who had just landed, came up to him.

"Mr. Lisle, I am glad of this chance to say 'Good-bye' to you. I looked for you just after you had left the ship."

With a warm shake of Lisle's hand, he went upon his way.

"That is Arthur Russell, a fellow-passenger, who shared my cabin with me. He is going to a Tea Estate up on the hills," said Lisle. "He told me he was on his way to marry a girl out here."

"I wonder if he is the man who is engaged to marry Martin's sister," Mainwaring said.

"He did not mention names. He merely touch-

ed on the matter incidentally in conversation," said his friend.

The two young men were soon seated in a carriage, and driving beneath the beautiful Suriya and other shade-trees, towards Mainwaring's bungalow in the Cinnamon Gardens. It was embowered in foliage; all kinds of feathery palms, gorgeous crotons and rosy oleanders with their colour and fragrance, making charming Mainwaring's comfortable quarters. The verandahs, supported by rows of white pillars, occupied as much space as the rest of the bungalow, and were furnished with luxurious lounges.

"We use the verandahs more than the rooms," said Mainwaring, as they stood together on the wide verandah, looking out upon the garden. "They possess the advantages of outdoor life, and yet we are completely protected from the heat of the tropical sun."

"You are just the same as ever, Norman," Lisle said affectionately, turning to his friend. "I was thinking rather sadly that I had no friend to welcome me, when you appeared so unexpectedly. As with the rolling stone that has no time to gather moss, so it must be, I think, with perpetual travellers regarding friends. There has been no moss for such a rolling stone as I."

"I never forget old times, or friends," said Mainwaring, soberly. "Why did you never write me in these last three years? Surely you received my letters, Lisle? What have you been doing all this time?"

"Travelling," the other answered, somewhat shortly, with a recurrence of the pained and weary look.

Mainwaring gave him one quick glance, and instinctively dropped the subject.

"My mother is late," he said, referring to his watch, as a servant brought the tea. "Ah! here she comes at last."

A handsome, stately lady was approaching as he spoke, and both advanced to meet her.

"Mother, this is Herbert Lisle," said Mainwaring, presenting him.

Mrs. Mainwaring held out her hand to greet him, with a pleasant smile.

"My son has often spoken of you, Mr. Lisle. I am so glad to know you."

"The pleasure is not wanting on my side, I assure you, Mrs. Mainwaring. It was so good of you to ask me here."

"We are glad to have you. Norman is devoted to you. Now, let me give you tea," she added, ad-

vancing to the table, and taking the chair her son had placed for her.

Mainwaring stood beside her, watching her, as she poured out the tea.

“You were a little late in coming, mother?”

“Yes; I was detained. I was driving with Clare Carruthers this afternoon. Will you give Mr. Lisle his tea—and hand him those hot cakes. I understand that you have just arrived here after a long trip around the world?”

“Oh, Bertie is a great traveller,” observed her son. “We made our first acquaintance travelling. We were together first on board the same ship when I was going to England. He was on his way then to the Continent.”

“You must be tired of travel,” said Mrs. Mainwaring. “Norman tells me that your home is in Devonshire. Shall you not settle down in England now?”

“I do not know yet,” said Bertie restlessly, the dawn of a doubtful and harassed look appearing in his eyes.

“We must try to keep him at Colombo, mother, whilst I am here. Meantime, he must remain with us for a few days.”

“You are very kind,” said Lisle. “Do I understand you are not staying here long yourself?”

"I may return to England, possibly, at any time," said Mainwaring. "And you?"

"I was on my way home," said Lisle. "Some freak made me decide to land. I know now it was fate, for you were here."

"We shall return to England when Mr. Caruthers and his daughter go. Bertie, why not wait awhile, and go with us? It would make a pleasant travelling-party for us all."

"By the way," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "they dine with us to-night. They are great friends of ours. We must introduce you, Mr. Lisle."

"Thank you, Mrs. Mainwaring."

Lisle's attention was now claimed by Mainwaring, who took him off with him to his own room.

CHAPTER II.

That evening Lisle waited abstractedly for the arrival of the expected guests, as he sat with Mrs. Mainwaring and her son in the drawing-room, with its polished floors and Oriental mats, capacious lounges, and open windows, through which came the balmy evening air laden with wafts of perfume from the garden.

He scarcely heard their conversation as he waited, and gave absent answers when he was addressed, for his thoughts were far away, lost in the past.

Mr. Carruthers and his daughter were announced. Lisle looked abstractedly towards the door as they were ushered in. Then he started up, and went impetuously forward, holding out his hands impulsively towards the girl who was just entering the room, as though he would have grasped her hands in his.

"Stella!" he exclaimed, his voice thrilling with a sudden recognition and a sudden intense joy.

Mrs. Mainwaring and her son both turned to-

wards him in astonishment.. The girl herself stood looking at him with such blank surprise and wonder that it recalled him to himself. Mr. Carruthers, too, was gazing at him in a way he could not understand. He had started violently when he first heard Bertie's exclamation, and he had wheeled sharply round to look at him. He had now apparently recovered from his first astonishment. He turned towards his daughter, but still kept his keen and penetrating eyes fixed observantly on Lisle's face. And he put his hand, with a caressing gesture, lightly on her shoulder as he stood beside her, allowing it to rest there for an instant.

Miss Carruthers involuntarily glanced again at Lisle, and Bertie almost fancied, as he met her look, that a half-defined expression of uneasy wonder, almost of confusion, crept into her face. Her eyes fell again before he could be certain he was right. and the colour slowly deepened in her cheeks as she turned away.

Mr. Carruthers, who had watched her closely from beneath his heavy eyebrows, had caught his daughter's look. He turned again to Lisle.

"It appears you have found some chance resemblance in my daughter to some friend of yours?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes. An accidental likeness," Lisle replied confusedly, with some distress. "Pray pardon me!"

As he spoke he turned away.

"It was but a wild fancy, based upon a chance resemblance," he reflected, smiling somewhat sadly at his folly.

This young woman, with the clear-cut features and soft, dark eyes, was strangely like the girl who had been constantly before him in his thoughts these past three years. Though there was certainly something in her look—or was it something wanting?—which somehow made her seem quite different, after all, on looking at her now.

Meantime, Mr. Carruthers had fallen into heavy reverie, from which, with an effort, he roused himself at last.

Dinner was announced, and they were soon seated at table in the small but well-appointed dining-room.

"Shall you be glad to return to England, dear?" Mrs. Mainwaring said later on to Miss Carruthers.

"I love Ceylon, have much enjoyed my trip, and feel the better for it. Yet, for some reasons, I prefer my own home life and settled occupations. Colombo is more for a happy holiday."

“By the way,” said Mr. Carruthers to Mainwaring, “I am leaving the hotel, and taking over Mrs. Dawson’s bungalow for the remainder of our stay. The strong sea-air at Galle Face does not quite suit Clare, and we are seeking the milder atmosphere of Cinnamon Gardens.”

“I am surprised Mrs. Dawson has made up her mind to part with her charming bungalow,” said Mainwaring. “She was so attached to it. She took such pride and pleasure in her garden there.”

“They are leaving Colombo soon,” his mother said. “She and her husband are soon going to India. I saw her yesterday. She told me Mr. Dawson has a good appointment there.”

“Indeed! They are going to India? Well, I had not heard of their intention. It is news to me.”

“I am looking forward to the driving here,” said Lisle. “The carriage roads are excellent. They are uncommon in the wild luxuriance of beautiful vegetation all around.”

“I had a delightful drive to-day with Mrs. Mainwaring,” said Miss Carruthers. “The brown thatched huts and groups of gaily-clad natives give life to a charming scene of which I never tire!”

“You will see creepers festooned from tree to tree,” said Mainwaring, “and banyans stretching

in natural archways over the roads. Here and there is a perfect blaze of flame-coloured gloriosa, and orange and lemon trees covered with fragrant bloom."

"The red roads are so restful to the eye," said Mrs. Mainwaring. "They are in charming contrast to the surrounding monotonous green. An evening drive through this part of Colombo is entrancing."

"You may wander under the shade of the palms," said Mainwaring, "or rest beneath graceful bamboos."

"The atmosphere is an exquisite natural fragrance from surrounding blooms," added Miss Carruthers. "All these pleasures are in store for you."

"I hear you are to take up quarters at Galle Face," Mr. Carruthers said to Lisle. "Meantime, will you lunch there with me to-morrow?"

"I shall be most happy, Mr. Carruthers."

A servant entered at this moment, and approaching Mainwaring, gave him some message in an undertone, receiving some order from his master in return.

Mrs. Mainwaring rose, and took Miss Carruthers away with her.

"What do you think of Numo?" Mainwaring inquired of Lisle, as his servant left the room again.

He had observed Lisle's eyes fixed on him curiously, as he served the coffee.

"He seems to remind me of someone I have known," said Lisle. "That odd brown face seems strangely like, and yet unlike, one I have somewhere seen before. My memory is playing me some trick."

"There is something in his face," said Mr. Carruthers, thoughtfully, "that gives one the impression he has led a miserable, hunted kind of life."

"There is probably not one of us," Lisle said, suddenly, with a deep undercurrent of gravity in his tones, "who can live according to his heart-felt wishes. All life is a compromise between what we want, and what we can get; what we aspire to do and what we can achieve."

He spoke bitterly, and the two men looked at him with surprise as he turned hastily aside.

"Well, I think most of us get on very well on the whole!" Mr. Carruthers said, good-humouredly.

They rose with one accord to join the women on the wide verandah just outside the drawing-room.

"You are early!" said Mrs. Mainwaring, smilingly, as they approached her through the open door. "We scarcely expected to see you yet awhile."

"We do not care to smoke to-night," said Mr. Carruthers, with an answering smile, as he took the seat beside her.

"We have come to beg for music," added Mainwaring, "if Miss Carruthers will favour us presently."

As Mrs. Mainwaring became engaged with Mr. Carruthers and her son, Miss Carruthers turned to Lisle, who had come over to her side. They walked a little way together on the wide verandah in the cool delicious evening air, and stood leaning against the pillars as they inhaled the perfume from the sleeping garden, and watched the fireflies dance in the dark foliage of the palms.

"Have you been long in Colombo, Miss Carruthers?" questioned Lisle.

"Not very long. We took the sea-trip for my health, and, on stopping here, were so enchanted with the place that we thought we would like to live on the spot awhile. The climate is delightful, suits us perfectly, and the island is extremely interesting to us all."

"Did Mrs. Mainwaring arrive with you by the same ship?"

"She had arrived already with her son. We became acquainted on the spot."

"I understand you will return to England soon?"

"Not yet awhile. You heard my father speaking of a bungalow he wished to take."

"My own home is in Devonshire," said Lisle reflectively. "But I have not seen it for the last three years."

"Why so?" asked Miss Carruthers, with some interest.

"I cannot settle there..and I have been travelling."

"Why are you so restless?" she asked gently.

Her dark eyes rested on his face with a sympathetic look in the soft light.

"Clare! Will you play to us?" called Mrs. Mainwaring's voice, before Lisle could reply.

Miss Carruthers turned at once, and went in to the drawing-room to the piano. She played remarkably well from memory. The calm and quiet, unmoved expression, the want of ordinary animation that her face wore usually, now had disappeared. Her countenance was full of animated feeling; now pale and grave, now flushed and keen, according to the movement of the music. It seemed as though her soul were in the sounds.

The music seemed to speak to them as well as to herself, and they all listened to her, spell-bound.

At times there was a strange impression as of sighs of dumb and anguished yearning, a longing for expression; as of a soul that beat itself against its prison bars in a vain effort to escape and wing its way out into realms of space, and light, and air. Then suddenly the music pulsed and throbbed, instinct with life and light. The fainting soul seemed to revive, expand, escape. To mount into the realms of life and light, and to reach peace and rest.

Lisle hung over the instrument, his whole soul in according sympathy.

"Your music is exquisite! You are a true musician," he said feelingly, when at last she ceased. "And you have been well trained."

"Oh, I love music dearly! And I had good teaching in my early life."

"It seems to me that it excites your feelings very much—even to a touch of pain, perhaps?"

"It is true that it affects my feelings—but it is quite a different thing from pain. I cannot explain it to you, Mr. Lisle. It stimulates, relieves, and soothes my mind. Forms an outlet for otherwise inexpressible and painful feeling. And at times there is even a promise of some future ecstasy of happiness."

Lisle now regarded her with fresh interest. Glancing up, she caught his eyes fixed with marked attention on her face. A sudden puzzled look as of a strange, half-recognition of him, slowly widened her dark eyes, then passed away again. With a deep blush she turned away her head, her fingers trifling on the keys once more in some soft, intermittent plaintive melody.

Before he knew, Lisle had bent down to her.

“Do you know me? Have we met before?” He breathed low in her ear.

Clare looked quickly up again, with the old, blank look of wonder, and shook her head. She rose and stood before him. She suddenly put out her hand and lightly touched his arm.

“Mr. Lisle,” she said, impulsively, “when I came in to-night, why did you think that we had met before?”

“Excuse me,—that is a question I cannot answer,” he said hurriedly, and with some agitation in his tones.

Lisle was relieved when Mrs. Mainwaring came in to them, and the talk became general. He felt vaguely troubled. He longed to be alone. He wanted time and solitude to think.

He was silent and distraught for the rest of the

evening. It came to an end at last, and the invited guests took their departure.

When Mr. Carruthers and his daughter had gone back to their hotel, Lisle sat smoking on the verandah with Mainwaring. He had gratefully accepted his invitation to remain with him for a few days.

Mainwaring, who was silent and abstracted, sat leaning back in his chair, looking straight in front of him with unseeing eyes.

The hour was somewhat late, and the servants had long since gone to bed. The bungalow was hushed and still, and they had stayed out here for a last cigar before retiring to their rooms.

For a short time they both sat smoking silently, each lost in his own thoughts. But, at length, Norman Mainwaring glanced up, and turned towards his friend with a look of interest on his keen brown face.

"You appeared to recognise Miss Carruthers this evening, Lisle?" he observed interrogatively, as he quietly shook the ash from his cigar.

Lisle pushed his chair back, beyond the range of soft light streaming forth from the open drawing-room window, mingling with the moonlight falling on his face. He had been half-expecting, and half-

dreading, any reference on his friend's part to the occurrence.

"I only fancied that I recognised in her resemblance to a girl whom I knew several years ago," he said with some constraint. "It appears, however, I was mistaken, misled by some mere accidental trick of likeness."

"Will you explain this to your old friend, Bertie?"

"I cannot, Norman. Please do not touch on this again. It is an inexpressively painful subject to me."

Mainwaring regarded his friend thoughtfully.

"You are certain, then, that you and Miss Caruthers have never met before?" he asked, after a slight pause.

Lisle also paused ere he replied. An old awakened memory, lying deep within his heart, had stirred that heart to pain.

"Quite sure," he answered finally, though even as he spoke, the old doubt rose again unbidden in his mind, to be crushed resolutely down once more.

Mainwaring rose abruptly from his seat, and grasped warmly his friend's hand. He felt some intuition in his soul that Lisle was somehow suffer-

ing; and he longed to share his pain with him if he might comfort him.

“I see you have finished your cigar,” he said, tossing his own half-smoked one out amongst some hybiscus shrubs. “It is getting late—let us go in to bed.”

CHAPTER III.

Next day Lisle drove with Mainwaring to Galle Face to lunch with Mr. Carruthers, and to secure a room at the hotel. He delighted in the pleasant drive along the road that overlooked the bright blue sea.

Mr. Carruthers met them under the tall portico near the moulded balustrade, where they could hear the sound of the surf outside, falling on the shore. The grounds of the hotel extended to the margin of the sea. Palms fringed the yellow beach and shaded the large garden. Through these the air blew gently in on them.

Mr. Carruthers led them into the cool and spacious entrance-hall, which was fitted in luxurious Oriental style. After lunch they returned to the verandah, and sat smoking in lounge cane chairs in the pleasant breeze.

"Mainwaring has asked me to join you in your coming trip to Kandy," Mr. Carruthers said to Lisle. "I am really sorry I cannot come, as I shall be engaged in moving into my new bungalow."

"I am sorry, too," said Lisle. "What is the climate like at Kandy?"

"Surprisingly temperate. You will be glad of a blanket there at night, though here it is never required."

"I expected it would be extremely hot."

"The days are hot and glaring, but the early mornings and evenings are refreshing and cool," said Mainwaring.

"The weather seems to me quite strangely settled in Ceylon."

"We have an occasional thunder-storm, however. In Allagalla unsettled weather is extremely frequent.

"You should take Mr. Lisle on a sporting expedition to Nuwarda Eliya," Mr. Carruthers said to Mainwaring.

"I intend to do it," answered Mainwaring. "At one time, Lisle was a capital shot, and I must see if his hand and eye have kept their pristine skill and cunning. Have you your favourite old rifle with you, Lisle?"

"Yes, I brought it with me, Norman. I have done a little shooting at odd times."

"Well, you must try your hand on the elephants, and secure a tusk or two. We will start

next week, and I shall take Numo with me. He is a fair shot now."

"I want to go into the Pettah to the native shops," said Lisle, as they were leaving the hotel.

"I will accompany you there," said Mainwaring. "I want to buy some native curiosities to take to England."

They soon dismissed their carriage, and ordered a couple of 'rickshaws to ride into the Pettah.

"Do you recollect that tale," asked Mainwaring, "of the man who refused to ride in a rickshaw, on the ground that it was wrong to make a fellow-creature run between shafts like an animal? But, when overcome with the heat of the tropical sun, and meeting a friend riding comfortably under the cool shelter of the awning of his rickshaw, he was quite converted to their use for evermore."

"Colombo is unique. What strange variety of costume is worn by each race," Lisle said reflectively, "in accordance with caste, or their social position."

"This question of caste is of unceasing interest to me."

"It seems curious," said Lisle, when their men had run some way, "to see the natives carrying on their everyday pursuits thus in the open street."

“This is our chance to see the customs of Oriental life. The women are unveiled, the houses and stalls are open everywhere—you can see the interiors.”

“This mixed crowd of people seem to live their life almost entirely in the open air,” said Lisle, with interest. “See the children playing amongst the traffic over there!”

“Well, all this falls in with the conditions of climate and the disposition of the people!”

“Yes, closed-up dwellings would be insupportable in this tropical heat.”

They made their purchases, and with their rickshaws full of them, returned home in the best of life and spirits.

A week later the two young men were on their way to Kandy. The scenery on the way right into the heart of mountain country, enchanted Lisle. Scenes of quaint husbandry; glimpses of villages embosomed in palms and beautiful groups of tropical trees. Occasionally a glimpse of a young Tea Estate amidst palm groves and rice fields. They remained at Kandy for a few days. They had arranged to make up a shooting party on arriving at Nuwara Eliya, at the comfortable rest-house where they were to stay.

On arrival there they found a man who had arrived before them, sitting smoking on the verandah.

As Mainwaring approached, he greeted him as an acquaintance, and rose to welcome him. He was a Tea-planter whom Mainwaring had met some time before, when Ned Martin was at Colombo on business.

They exchanged a few words together; then Mainwaring presented Lisle.

"Mr. Lisle, I am quite pleased to meet you," Martin said, as he shook hands with him. ,

"The last time I met you, Ned," said Mainwaring to Martin, "you told me you were expecting to lose your sister, as she was to leave your Tea Estate for England, to be married there. I heard afterwards that Arthur Russell had come out for her."

"Yes," responded Martin, genially. "He is now my brother-in-law. They were married directly on his arrival, and Evelyn has returned with him to England. I am on my way home, after seeing them off. I hoped to see you at Colombo, but heard you had gone to Kandy."

They spent the time together pleasantly, and sat smoking on the verandah in the moonlight, in the cool and balmy air of evening, before they sought their couches for the night.

"You must come and stay at my new bunga-

low," said Martin, heartily, "any time you can find your way so far up on the hills."

"We will!" said Mainwaring. "Why are you giving up your old plantation for another one? I am surprised to hear you have exchanged estates with William Burton."

Martin threw back his head against his comfortable lounging-chair, blowing a cloud of tobacco-smoke into the air ere he replied.

"Thereby hangs a tale," said he at last.

Lisle and Mainwaring unanimously expressed their wish to hear his tale, for his tones were full of mystery. And after a moment's silence he began.

CHAPTER IV.

“You know,” said Ned, “how I delighted in my life and work on my old Tea Estate; and business was going on well with me.

“Soon after I came out to Ceylon my father died, and my sister Evelyn joined me here, and till I married, Evelyn was the mistress of my bungalow.

“Two young fellows settled on the next estate, adjoining mine, and we became intimate with them. They were partners, James Smith and Robert Lee; and both fell in love with my pretty sister. She was one of the few English girls about, and the two young men were bitterly jealous of each other, creating much uneasiness in my own mind as to what might happen if she encouraged one of them; for the elder, James, was passionate and violent in temper.

“At last, they had to go together to Colombo on business, leaving an overseer in charge whilst they were gone. After some time had passed, the elder partner returned alone to us, representing that

Robert had resolved to quit Ceylon, as he was sick of planting tea. After his return, James Smith was often at our bungalow visiting my sister. But she was now expecting soon to marry Russell, and a change in the man became apparent to us all. He contracted gloomy, brooding fits, and began to neglect his estate, to our surprise, for he had been so keen and eager a short time back. He also absented himself from home for days together, returning with his jaded horse, and a strange wild look that disturbed me very much.

“At length Evelyn married Russell, and, as she was to return with him to England, I resolved to accompany them to Colombo, to see them aboard the steamer there that was to take my sister to her new home.

“There had been strange rumours of an unknown man who mysteriously appeared to travellers on the way, and then mysteriously vanished from their view. One evening, when we stopped at a resting-place, a stranger came in from the opposite direction and requested a night’s lodging; and I think these tales were floating in my mind as I looked at him. He wore a slouching hat which concealed his face, and appeared to be suffering from great distress of mind and nervous trepidation; and we did not like the look of him. However, we could

not turn him out, so consented to his remaining, and arranged amongst ourselves that we would watch him all night.

“Our resting-place was on the edge of a valley. The track along which our route would lie on the morrow wound down the side of the valley and up the other side, and we could just discern it through the palms and trees. Just at dusk my sister, who was standing at the edge of this valley, suddenly gave a frightened cry, and called out, ‘A man is running along the track, as though he were pursued!’ We all started up, thinking that some unwonted danger was upon us, but nothing was in sight. Evelyn, on being questioned, still in a state of great excitement, said that a man had suddenly run past her, turned a white face with widely-opened eyes towards her, and had run along the track and up the opposite side of the valley. Of course, we were inclined to deride this story, and pretended to laugh at it; but she was so positive as to what she had seen that we began to feel that there might be some sort of danger ahead. The stranger, who, of course, heard all that passed, remained sullenly smoking apart, with averted face, and took no part in the discussion.

“It was my turn to be first on watch, and my watch was to be from eight o’clock to midnight.

With my rifle loaded and lying across my arm ready for instant use, I paced slowly the verandah. The great jungle lay all around; its silence only broken by the occasional distant howl of a jackal; and the moon was shedding floods of light upon everything. About midnight, just as my term of duty was expiring, I stood on the spot where my sister had stood, on the edge of the valley, when suddenly there appeared at a short distance from me the faint shadowy figure of a man, who turned towards me a pale face filled with a look of pain, but with sightless, widely-opened eyes; quickly he ran past me, down the valley, and up the track amongst the palms on the other side. Filled with a nameless feeling of dread, I went and roused my companions to tell them what I had seen, and impressed them with the reality of the appearance, which tallied exactly with what my sister had described. There was little more sleep for us that night; as for the stranger, he never slept the whole night, but sat smoking sullenly.

“Next morning the stranger approached me where I stood with Evelyn and her husband, and observing us clearly for the first time, he gave a sudden and fearful cry, and his hat falling off, I recognised with horror and astonishment the strangely altered countenance of James Smith.

“‘I will confess my sin!’ he cried, ‘for God and man are both against me now. I killed Robert Lee, and he lies half a mile away across the valley. We were returning together from Colombo, when he boasted to me that he had Evelyn’s favour, and I killed him in a fit of jealousy. But I have had no peace since that awful hour. Day and night I have suffered anguish, and have constantly returned to watch beside the spot where he lies buried, lest it might be discovered, or he might rise again.’

“‘He turned his ghastly face towards my sister, and fixed his hollow, burning eyes on hers, as she shrank away from him in fear and horror. ‘It was for her I killed him, and I was cruelly punished when she married the Englishman and made my sin in vain.’

“‘He turned away, and pulling his hat down over his eyes, he left the spot, moaning out, ‘There is no rest—no rest for me in all the world!’ Whilst we all stood round in dead silence, and never raised a hand to check his way.

“‘As soon as possible we proceeded on our journey. We crossed the valley, and after travelling about half a mile on the other side, we sought poor Robert’s grave, though I had still a lingering hope of some illusion of my sight, and of mere delusion on James Smith’s part.’”

“And what,” asked Mainwaring, as Martin paused a moment, “did you find?—you found his grave?”

“We found a grave,” returned Ned slowly, in a tone of suffering.

He rubbed his chin in a distracted kind of way.

“We found a grave,” he repeated, with slow emphasis. “And though I am not a superstitious man,” concluded he, “yet I affirm I saw that shadowy figure in the moonlight as plainly as I can see my hand—and, moreover, since his disappearance there has been no news of Robert Lee!”

A cloud passed over the moon, and a deep shadow fell on them. Martin rose, shuddering, and without another word, passed hurriedly into the bungalow, and they saw him no more that night.

CHAPTER V.

Next day, accompanied by Numo, the three men set out together on a shooting jaunt. They inspected the wilder scenery with much interest, going to a considerable distance to seek big game. For about two hours they followed the tracks of elephants to no purpose. At last they were startled unexpectedly by the shrill trumpet of an elephant in the jungle. They crept cautiously along the outskirts of the jungle, and after a long tramp, suddenly turning round some thickly-growing trees, they saw a couple of elephants, which instantly disappeared from view. So dense was the jungle that they could see nothing. They could not hear the faintest sound. With a tremendous crash the herd dashed suddenly through the jungle, escaping beyond pursuit. Mainwaring rushed forward, catching sight of three stray elephants leading across his path. He attempted to get a shot. At the same moment the elephants charged, two of them dashing on ahead and following their companions. The third one stopped sharp

round and charged direct on the affrighted Numo with a scream of rage.

Rushing to one side, Numo suddenly caught his foot and fell, as the elephant charged furiously down on him. Lisle and Martin, who had been somewhat in advance, were startled by Numo's sudden agonised shrill cry of terror. They turned round hastily, and saw him as he had fallen helpless on the ground before the infuriated elephant. Lisle stood quietly, quite cool and steady, his rifle raised to his shoulder, and his finger on the trigger. He wore a confident and almost careless air.

"Keep still!" he called out calmly, in low, clear tones.

He had been waiting for a closer shot, and fired instantly, when the elephant was within about six yards of him. It collapsed instantly to a shot in the centre of the forehead. The ground trembled with the heavy shock as it fell dead near its intended victim. Lisle had been just in time.

Ere the echo of the sound of the report had died away, ere the hazy smoke had cleared, Numo scrambled hurriedly to his feet. His sun-burnt face had become in a moment ashy-grey with terror, and his eyes looking strained and fixed as he gazed on the huge, unwieldy animal lying within a couple of yards of him.

The rescued man started forward to Lisle's side, and, falling on his knees beside his rescuer, he caught his hand in both his own.

"You have saved my life—I swear there is fate in this!" he cried fervently. "Let me be your faithful servant now—I will serve no other master!"

"Where have I seen a face like this before?" mused Lisle. "It somehow seems familiar to me—yet I can find no clue in my memory."

Lisle spent hours in thought upon the theme, long after they got home to their resting-house that night.

On their return to Colombo a few weeks later on, Lisle dined with Mainwaring one evening at his bungalow, and the two men went out alone for an after-dinner stroll by the lake.

"Norman," his friend said, after a long, deep silence, "may I have Numo as my servant? The poor fellow has become attached to me because I saved him from the elephant. And he swears he will not leave me now!"

"I am relieved and glad to let him go. I am not particularly keen on having him myself, if I am obliging you. Numo is a queer fellow," Mainwaring added thoughtfully, "and I cannot make him out."

“What is his nationality?”

“That is more than anyone can tell. He can speak several languages, seems at home anywhere. He appears to be a strange mixture of Frenchman and of native, with an odd and unexpected dash of Englishman thrown in. Though a queer, secretive sort of man, he makes an excellent servant on the whole.

Norman Mainwaring returned to England with his mother before the time specified for taking his departure from Ceylon; recalled by unforeseen exigencies in his own business. And Numo became Lisle's servant.

CHAPTER VI.

At this time, Lisle was often visiting at Mr. Carruthers' bungalow. Scarcely a day passed now when he did not see Miss Carruthers. The old gentleman seemed to like him very much, and encouraged his visits there.

"Clare will not dine with us this evening," he said on one occasion, soon after the Mainwarings had left Ceylon.

"I missed her presence in the drawing-room when I came in."

"She is keeping quietly in her own room to-night."

"I hope she is not ill," said Lisle, with some concern.

"She has been unusually excited lately—since your advent here, in fact—and she gets prostrated afterwards from the re-action. She has not been so well to-day, and to-night seems rather spent and languid.

"I am sorry to hear this."

"It is indispensable that Clare should be kept free, as far as possible, from all undue excitement," said Mr. Carruthers gravely. "It is apt to make her ill."

"Why so?" asked Lisle, with some surprise. "She seems well enough, I think. She is surely health personified."

"Oh, I do not mean any regular kind of illness, Lisle. A touch of nerves, you know. A certain amount of quiet is of essential benefit to her, if not entirely necessary for her nerves. So far as mere appearance goes, as you say, Clare is most certainly the picture of good health—and a charming picture, too!" he added affectionately.

"I do not understand," said Lisle.

"She has a slight affection of the nerves. There was a complication of a most unusual kind that I cannot explain to you. I confess I do not altogether understand the case myself."

"Is it serious in its nature?"

"Oh, it may right itself at any time, and we are very hopeful, on the whole. Still, her eventual recovery greatly depends, the doctor said, upon our care of her."

"I suppose," Lisle said, thoughtfully, "that this affection of the nerves of which you speak, is

the cause of the apparent difference in her from other young women of her age?"

Mr. Carruthers suddenly wheeled sharply round on him, and looked full in his face with a searching and unsparing scrutiny.

"Ah! You feel a difference in her?—And in what way?"

But Lisle's face was filled with strong perplexity and pain. The old gentleman perceiving this, for some reason of his own, forbore to press the question home and to demand an answer.

Some little time passed by. Mr. Carruthers and his daughter were still in Colombo, and Lisle was staying on at the Galle Face Hotel. He was still uncertain as to his own movements; whether he would go a-travelling again, or settle down on his estate in Devonshire. The cause of his apparent distaste for returning to his home, and the reason for his restless wanderings about the world, and of his obvious uncertainty as to his movements, was hidden deep in his own mind.

Lisle dined quietly one evening at Mr. Carruthers' bungalow. He and Clare were left alone in the drawing-room afterwards, Mr. Carruthers having gone off to his study to answer an important letter.

Lisle had been giving Clare some sketch of his own travels.

"Have you ever visited the Continent?" he asked her presently.

She suddenly raised her head and looked at him with a strange expression, as of being half-awakened.

"I was once on the Continent before——"

She paused suddenly, broke off confused, with much distress; then finished hurriedly, and with a changed and altered, paling face,

"——before I lost my grandfather," she said.

Lisle started violently as he met her troubled eyes. Then Clare's next words poured forth with sudden passion.

"I cannot understand. I sometimes fancy we have met before—and yet it is impossible. How could it be true?—My mind seems full of strange and fleeting visions that pass and fade away ere I can grasp their purport. And I feel then there is something wanting in me, that at these times almost detracts from my intelligence. A veil seems to descend upon me then. I somehow seem to be the victim of a double want of knowledge. Why should I feel thus? Till I met you, I was content and happy with my lot."

Lisle stood silently regarding her. He was lost in wonder of this mystery.

“Do you believe in the theory of a complete change in anyone, in every seven years?” asked Clare.

“Why not?” responded Lisle. “Though I think we are perpetually changing in one way or another, perhaps unconsciously. Outgrowing things, for instance, or growing into things. There might well be the evolution and development of some gift, or some defect. But it takes time to evolve, develop anything. Perhaps we might only become aware of change in others or in ourselves in seven years’ time.”

“Do you believe in re-incarnation?” Clare went on, still eagerly pursuing the train of thought aroused in her. “Do you believe that we can come to life again after hundreds of years’ oblivion? Perhaps we might then meet and recognise a kindred soul we had known and loved already in that other former life of ours, in the time of long ago. Yet possibly to seek it in the dark, and never find it!”

Clare shuddered slightly, and looked straight before her with a faint weary longing. Lisle drew

nearer to her, now much agitated. But he could not speak.

During the whole evening he had observed her closely and had seen in her at moments, something that perplexed and troubled him almost as a want of intelligent understanding might have done; something that he could not fathom. A want, perhaps, of some undercurrent of reflective power. These phases in her generally followed closely on the occasional glances which she cast at him, the purport of which he could not define.

Clare presently resumed expression of her thoughts.

“I sometimes feel sure I have known you in some old forgotten time,—I cannot force my memory any further to look back into the past. I fancy it must be a fragment of some former life of ours, lived, doubtless, many hundreds of years ago! You recognised me first! Think of that first evening at Mrs. Mainwaring’s bungalow!”

Lisle sat silent, deeply pondering, his eyes bent on the ground. A sudden enormous wave of strong deep feeling that had long been gathering its forces, overwhelmed him now, and he was striving to control himself.

He had known there was warm friendship on

both sides. Had known they found an interest, and even pleasure, in each other's companionship. He could not but feel he had been dangerously happy when with Clare. And he felt, too, in a flash, that he unwittingly had gained Clare's love. Yes! that must surely be the subtle meaning of these dreams of hers. Their souls were drawn together—it was love!

Clare went on meditating: "These lines express my thoughts:

"There was a door to which I found no key,
There was a veil past which I might not see,
Some little talk awhile of me and thee
There seemed, and then no more of thee and me!"

Lisle had intently watched the speaking countenance as he rapturously listened to her clear, sweet tones, so full of feeling now, until she ceased. Again that strong, deep wave swept over him. This time it carried all before it irresistibly with its relentless might. For the moment, then, he had forgotten all. He was only conscious of his love for Clare.

"He bent forward suddenly and caught her hands in his.

"I love you, Clare—love you with my whole strength!"

Clare sat with downcast eyes and fluttering

breath. As Lisle drew her nearer she swayed suddenly towards him, and he gathered her in his arms, close to his heart. An irresistible longing and a strong determination came upon him now. His lips were almost on her lips. He felt her fluttering breath upon his cheek as he bent over her. But that kiss was never given. A soft girlish face, so like her own! still came between them. Its memory recalled Lisle to himself. He had no right to love Clare, or to tell her so. At the eleventh hour, in honour he must go, the words now burning on his lips for their relief of utterance, unspoken; and leave her to forget, if possible, before it was too late. His sense of honour conquered his desire. He drew back his burning face again, as though he had been stung, and released her from his hold.

Almost with pain he felt that Clare had not repulsed him. She had not striven to withdraw her hands from his strong grasp. She had not shrunk away from his embrace. She had rested for a moment in his arms, against his heart, almost returned his clasp. She had made no effort to avoid the coming kiss. She had slightly drawn away from him, and raised her eyes to his with one swift, shy look of rapturous happiness. No help for him was here! Yes, he loved Clare, and knew she cared for

him. What else could matter to them now? And Stella had left him of her own free will. She might possibly be dead. It was impossible she could be living, else he would have heard of her, or found her now. Unborn To-morrow and dead Yesterday, why fret about them if To-day be sweet!

But the temptation passed with one swift, wild rush. In his innate loyalty to both of them, against himself, he felt a passionate reproach and burning anger in his heart.

"I can never ask you to forgive me! I have no right to love you!" he said bitterly to Clare. And his face was suddenly wrung as though with mortal pain. With a groan of self-reproach he turned away.

Whilst he was still struggling with his conflicting feelings, all at variance with one another as they were, Mr. Carruthers returned to the drawing-room.

"I have finished my business at last," he said, advancing to a comfortable chair and throwing himself into it with a sigh of genuine relief.

As he spoke he cast a keen uneasy glance first at his daughter, then at Lisle; but otherwise he seemed to take no further notice of the change in them.

“Lisle, I propose to return to England soon. I suppose you will make arrangements at the same time, to take the trip with us?”

“No; I shall remain here, after all. I find I cannot return with you as I had promised.”

Miss Carruthers looked up in pained surprise. A cutting pain shot through Lisle’s aching heart as he met that pleading, puzzled look. Mr. Carruthers still observed them closely from beneath his heavy eye-brows, but said nothing further; only sat apart in silence and deliberating thought.

On Lisle’s taking leave that evening, his host took the opportunity, when he was shaking hands with him, to speak to him apart.

“Will you call on me to-morrow morning, Mr. Lisle? I should consider it as a great favour if you would. Thank you; then I will expect you at eleven.”

CHAPTER VII.

Bertie Lisle's appointment with Mr. Carruthers was duly kept. He was shewn at once into his private study, where the old gentleman was restlessly pacing up and down, awaiting his arrival. He came forward hurriedly to meet him when he was announced.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Lisle. I have anxiously looked forward to this interview, for I had a special reason for inviting you to come. You think of withdrawing yourself from us—why should you do so, Herbert?"

Mr. Carruthers looked very kindly at the young man as he spoke.

"What do you mean?" faltered Lisle in great surprise.

"I have seen your attachment to my daughter, and her love for you."

"You think Clare cares for me?" asked Bertie, in painful agitation, and with changing colour.

"I am certain of it. Why do you desire to part from us?"

"Because I have no other choice, consistently with honour," Bertie cried, with sudden passion in his tones. "Mr. Carruthers, you do not know the facts!"

There was a long pause here, Mr. Carruthers cogitating deeply. Then with a sudden animated movement, he turned eagerly to Lisle, and laid a kindly hand on his arm.

"Believe it is no idle curiosity of mine, and from no mere wish to pry into your private personal affairs, that I earnestly invite some portion of your confidence. I beg you to tell me whom you took Clare for, on that first occasion at the Mainwarings?"

"I will be frank with you," responded Lisle, after a momentary hesitation and some thought.

He paused again, as though collecting his own thoughts.

"Mr. Carruthers, I had better tell you the plain facts as they occurred. Three years ago, then, I was travelling at nightfall in the South of France. A carriage which was travelling ahead of us was upset, and coming up behind it at the time, I found it contained a girl and an old man who appeared to

be unconscious. I took them on with me to the nearest house. A room was hastily prepared for the old man, a doctor summoned."

"He was not dead?" asked Mr. Carruthers, with much interest, as Lisle paused here.

"Not dead, though very near it. He had received some shock in the break-down, and died soon afterwards. Stella Verne would have been left friendless and alone, but I had married her on the day her grandmother died."

"Verne!" exclaimed Lisle's hearer suddenly. "I knew that name of old," he said more quietly.

He leant forward in his chair with increased attention.

"Mr. Verne," continued Lisle, "had left no personal letters, no address of any kind to give us any clue to Stella's friends. On questioning Stella, I had found her strangely ignorant of their life affairs. A heavily-sealed packet was the only thing that might contain the key to the mystery. It was merely marked 'Mr. C.,' but Stella objected to opening it."

Mr. Carruthers, whose attention for the last few minutes had been intense, now started suddenly. He bent forward, with some visible excitement in his manner. Lisle paused to glance at him with some surprise, but without comment.

“What became of the packet?” asked Mr. Carruthers earnestly, as Lisle sat meditating, with an air of hesitation, as though lost in doubt as to the finish of his story.

“You shall hear presently.”

“I begin to see some glimmering of light—I think I understand in part,” said the old gentleman, displaying the liveliest interest. “I long to hear the sequel to your tale. I should like to know the details concerning your young wife and her grandfather.”

“First hear me out,” said Lisle. “It is necessary that my story should unfold itself. At some future time I may tell you the whole detailed tale from the beginning. It would be extremely difficult for me to judge where to begin. For each part seems to have some bearing on another. It is a tedious story, and would tax your patience. Meantime, then, my wife and I arrived together at my home.”

“Lisle!” interrupted Mr. Carruthers urgently, pray tell me whom you took Clare for when you first met her at the Mainwarings?”

“I thought I saw in her a close resemblance to my wife, whom I had lost.”

Mr. Carruthers heard him eagerly ,with deeply fixed attention; but apparently, and strangely, as it seemed to Lisle, without astonishment.

“How did you lose her? Not by death, however, I infer?”

“No—not by death, indeed. Though I have sometimes thought, in my sad bitterness of spirit, that it had been best, perhaps.”

“How long ago?”

“Soon after we were married. But let me tell the facts as they took place. In the course of our first evening at home Stella asked me for the packet. This was the first time either of us had thought of it since leaving France. To my dismay I could not find it now. I was called away to see a messenger. When I returned to the library where we were sitting, I found that Stella had apparently retired to bed, tired out. I had important papers to look over, for I wished to make a proper settlement on my wife without delay. And I worked hard that night. When I went upstairs at a late hour, I found her bed untouched, a letter addressed to me lying on the table, together with her wedding-ring and our certificate of marriage, but there were no other traces of my wife. She had quite disappeared. Since that night I have had no news of

Stella, though I have been searching for her ever since."

"You did not set the detective force at work?"

"I made all possible inquiries in a private way,—but in dread of publicity and fearing her resentment, I preferred to search for her myself."

"Why," said Mr. Carruthers, seriously, "did your wife leave you thus?"

"That," replied Lisle, deeply colouring, with a look of intense pain, "I cannot disclose to you. The reason must be locked in my own heart."

"I must again refer to your supposed recognition of Clare when you first met her at the Mainwarings. I have dwelt much upon it in my thoughts."

"Why should you do that?"

"I attach much consequence to it."

"What consequence could a chance resemblance have?" asked Bertie hurriedly.

"I have surmised quite enough for my own satisfaction, Lisle. I have long believed it to be more than a mere accidental likeness that attracted your attention to her then."

Lisle did not reply at once. He seemed much agitated at the turn the talk had taken.

"I do not understand your tone at all. What

could I and Miss Carruthers have in common till we met here, for the first time?"

There was a long, still pause, Mr. Carruthers cogitating deeply.

I am going to repose a confidence in you," he said at last. "I will return your confidence with mine. It may result in benefit to both. About three years ago, my sister and I were on our way to London from the country. It was late in the evening when the train stopped for some minutes at a station to let the Express go by, and I got out to walk about. As I was in the act of turning to re-enter our compartment, I noticed a girl hurrying along the platform."

"Tell me what station, please?" interposed Lisle, suddenly.

Mr. Carruthers named it, and resumed—

"As she passed a lamp, the glaring light fell brightly on her face, and I was struck by the resemblance which she bore to my own daughter. I took notice of the compartment which she entered, and watched to see at what station she might alight."

"Did she go far down the line?"

"She did not leave the train till we arrived at

London. When I got out with my sister, I still contrived to keep my eye upon the girl."

"Did you lose sight of her at last?"

"No. We had just got outside the station where our carriage awaited us, when I saw her trying to cross the road. She was looking around her in bewilderment, and seemed unaccustomed to the glaring city lights, and crowded streets at night."

"In what direction did she go?"

"She hesitated painfully, as though in doubt, and in endeavouring to make her way across the street, she was knocked down by a passing vehicle."

"She was not hurt—not killed?"

"In an instant I had dashed across to rescue her, and I raised her up. Finding her insensible, I conveyed her to my carriage, in order to secure my sister's help. We drove straight home and sent for a physician."

"Did she recover—was she badly hurt?"

"Under the doctor's skilful treatment she recovered consciousness, and we found she was uninjured, save for general shock and a rather violent blow upon the head. My sister also had been struck by the strong resemblance which she bore my daughter. She was much interested. We nursed her carefully,

and she grew stronger day by day, and appeared to have recovered."

"Why—how appeared?" said Lisle. "Was she not really better?"

"Well, when we questioned her, it seemed that her memory was much impaired."

"I do not understand how this could be."

"She could tell us part of her early life, and up to a certain point—but not connectedly—a portion of the rest. There it fell short."

"At what point did her memory fail?"

"She could not remember where she had been going, or what she had been doing at the last."

"Kindly tell me all she could remember—and her name."

"She was confused about her name. She told us that she had been travelling with her grandfather; but she seemed cruelly confused about her facts, and we could gather nothing satisfactory. She wondered vaguely where her grandfather could be, and how they had been separated."

"This was positively all she could tell you of her past?"

"Her memory appeared to be in part, a confused and hopeless mixture of events; and, in part,

a hopeless blank. And as she was a stranger, we could not discriminate."

"What opinion did the doctor give?"

"The doctor hoped it might return in course of time. He attributed the partial loss of it to the severity of the blow she had received upon the head."

"In what manner did he think it might return?"

"Her memory might come suddenly, he said, with some new shock. Or it might perhaps return to her gradually, bit by bit. For this reason, I did not take more decided steps for the discovery of her friends."

"Tell me what became of her? What course did you pursue?"

"I adopted her as my daughter, because my heart warmed to her for her resemblance to my only child, who died some time ago."

"Why, Miss Carruthers, then ——"

"Is not in any way related to me. She is only my adopted daughter."

"Ah!"

Lisle's exclamation was intense. It was succeeded by a long, deep silence.

Lisle had grown very pale. The blood rushed back to his heart with painful shock. Once more he feared lest he might make a terrible mistake. He felt his powers of reasoning were warring with his heart. Yet he asked himself in a blind, unreasoning way if she could be another woman? Was it possible that she was merely playing a part. Could Clare Carruthers be indeed the Stella Verne whom he had married? Was there some mystery here he could not understand? Yet, though his anguish and his bitter anger had returned to him that he had endured when he had found her gone, his old faith in Stella rose unflinchingly, and as strong as ever. If it were truly she, he thought, Stella would not trifle with him now. There must indeed be strange coincidence, some strange mistake.

"I believe that you have found your wife in my adopted daughter. I could also think that the first sight of you partially aroused her sleeping memory," the old man went on reflectively. "She has been strangely restless since your advent here. and she loves you without rightly knowing who you are."

"If I dare but be certain," Lisle said slowly, his own heart thirsting passionately to be convinced. "What real proof have I that it is she?—

why should I be forgotten? Yet it would seem your story has indeed filled up the hiatus! If her memory will but return to her!" he cried impatiently.

"For the rest we must hope for the best, and trust to time. Time is kind and merciful upon the whole."

Lisle said no more, but warmly shaking hands with Mr. Carruthers, he took leave hurriedly. He appeared to have fresh weight upon his mind, and to wish to be alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

On his return to his hotel, Lisle found Numo awaiting him.

"Master," he said, with eager anxiety, "I have important news for you."

"Come to me when I ring," said Lisle, impatiently, as he went to his room.

By-and-bye he rang his bell. An instant later Numo entered. He advanced and stood before his master, at a short distance from him.

"You wished to speak with me?" said Lisle. "Have you any special news for me?"

"It bears on special matters—my desire is to speak with you," responded Numo slowly. He had a nervous, hesitating air.

"Speak in your own way," said Lisle, observing this. "I will allow you time to collect yourself."

Numo placed his trembling hands on the back of a chair near, and remained standing with his

heavy brooding eyes fixed on the ground. He said suddenly to Lisle:

“Look closely at me—have you any recollection of seeing me before?”

As he spoke he raised his bronzed and bearded face to regard Lisle steadily.

“There is something in your face that seems familiar to me; what it is, I really cannot say. I am not sure.”

But his thoughts flew swiftly the next instant to a certain phase in his own past. To an open window, where, half concealed by a gay flowering creeper, a pale and evil-looking face gazed in on him. To that face seen once again, for the last time by a brief flash of lightning in a violent storm.

“Think,” said Numo, “of an old deserted house in France; a storm; a night attack; a stolen packet.”

Lisle uttered a sharp exclamation.

“Then you——?”

“I am the perpetrator of the accidents that befell you travelling. I have come now to confess, to restore you the packet that I stole that night.”

“What has led you to pursue this course,” Lisle asked, surprised, “after this long interval of time? What influence can have been brought to bear on you?”

"You saved my life—I bear you deepest gratitude on that score."

"What was your object in stealing the packet from me, Numo?"

"I overheard you speaking with the lady. I believed it to contain some treasure of great value. I set the trap for you that night when you were travelling. I had passed a miserable life," he added bitterly, "had sunk low in the social scale, and suffered bitter shame and poverty. I had been made the scape-goat for the sins of others. I thought my chance had come to rise again; to be revenged upon society for that which I had suffered. But there were only papers in the packet, of no value to me. A miniature that was amongst them is still safely there—the gems that were its setting I wrenched out and sold some time ago."

"You are greatly altered," Lisle said, thoughtfully. "Small wonder I did not remember you again."

"I had had an illness at the time," said Numo, with strangely-bitter recollection of some past experience. "Since then the tropical suns have bronzed my face. And I have grown my beard."

"That night in the deserted house you had a weapon in your hand," Lisle said sternly, "and with

it you attacked a sleeping man. My young wife was seriously injured by the blow she turned aside from me."

"I swear that was accidental," the man cried fervently. "I was excited and unstrung—I had no thought beyond the stealing of the packet. I raised my hand instinctively when I was startled by your sudden, unexpected movement."

"Is the packet intact, saving for the abstraction of the gems?"

"Yes. I am in your hands. Punish me as you deem fit."

"I have no wish to punish you," returned Lisle gravely. "I am contented to receive the stolen packet safely again. Numo when you have made this restitution, you are free to go."

He took the packet that the man was offering. They parted in grave silence, with only one last look, that uttered volumes.

Lisle at once began examining the rifled packet. The miniature with its wrenched setting, first caught his eye, and he took it up eagerly. It bore a close resemblance to his wife. Stella's own soft eyes smiled at him from the painted ivory. There was some mystery here!

A letter caught his eye, addressed, to his aston-

ishment, to Mr. Carruthers, at some place in London. He instantly put up again the scattered papers and the miniature, and hurried to his friend, whom he gave a brief outline of the story of the loss and restoration of the packet. Mr. Carruthers opened it in solemn silence, with much deliberation, Lisle looking on with supreme eagerness.

"They are chiefly letters, and they are all apparently intended for my eye," said Mr. Carruthers slowly, as he leant back in his chair, and proceeded to open one. He looked thoughtfully at Lisle. "Why for mine?" he added in perplexity. "I cannot understand!"

"Read!" Lisle exclaimed impatiently, "that we may understand."

Mr. Carruthers read the letters one by one, with obvious new agitated interest.

"These letters prove your wife to be my granddaughter, beyond doubt!" he presently exclaimed, with deep emotion. "Lisle, I never knew that my daughter had left a little child!"

"I know nothing of your family history."

"Then I must tell you that my only daughter married against my will. Gerald Verne was well-bred, but very poor, and I resented the connection. He died two years after they were married, and my

poor girl did not survive him long. In my unyielding anger, I had been extremely harsh with her. She had written to me once, but I had taken no notice of her letter. And she, inheriting her father's pride, had not repeated it."

"And you never saw, or heard from her again?"

"No. I had never realised how badly off she was. I believed it to be her husband's doing that she wrote to me. But I always meant to forgive my darling in the end," the old man said remorsefully. "Her death was therefore a hard blow to me. I have never been able to forgive myself for my harsh and unjust treatment of my only child—whose only sin was that she loved her husband better than her father. I grieved that my poor Clare had left no child whom I could take home to my heart and hearth to love for her dear sake. Now, Lisle, amongst these papers is a letter to me from old Mr. Verne. It appears that he took Stella at her mother's death, when she was quite an infant, to a quiet country-place in England, where she was carefully brought up. This fact accounts for my not knowing that I had a grandchild."

"It seems strange Mr. Verne never let you know of it."

"I have no right to resent that, Lisle, in face of all the past. Feeling out of health, and fearing lest he might die suddenly and leave her friendless in a foreign land, he wrote me this letter, placing it with these undeniable proofs of her identity, together with Clare's portrait. He intended getting the packet forwarded to me by a man living near a quiet town in the South of France, where he was travelling; and to whom he was directed, as knowing my latest address through business connections. The letter," Mr. Carruthers said, "concludes with a most touching, strong appeal that I would receive and cherish my grandchild for her mother's sake."

He turned the papers over and took up the miniature.

"This is the true Clare's portrait," he said softly, as he handed it to Lisle.

The setting had been cruelly wrenched, to get out the gems, but the gentle, charming countenance that met Lisle's view had that strange look of Stella, and he regarded it again with interest.

"You had already done, in ignorance, all that the old man asks, for the sake of this supposed mere accidental likeness."

"If the poor old man could but have known how I would take Stella to my inmost heart, not even

knowing our relationship, on merely seeing her likeness to her mother! If he could but know that Stella long ago accompanied me to her mother's home, to bear her mother's name, as my adopted daughter."

"Well, you have made full amends for what is past," said Lisle, with sympathetic understanding.

"I was unjustly harsh once, with my darling—let me make atonement to the child, for my severity towards the mother!"

"If she indeed be Stella, if I remind her of our journey, it may assist her to remember all her past."

"Do not strive to force her memory, or you may defeat your cherished purpose and do her harm!" Mr. Carruthers said this feelingly.

"She must, then, still remain as Clare Carruthers to me?"

"For the present, therefore, she must still be Clare Carruthers to you. Though I feel convinced that she is truly Stella Lisle! Do not think me unfeeling for not allowing you to hurry on. I am certain it is best to let her memory come naturally, and to give her time."

CHAPTER IX.

Lisle had been staying awhile at Mr. Carruthers' bungalow. But though he knew Clare cared for him, he seemed to come no nearer to her in her memory. There were times, indeed, when he almost despaired of ever doing so. Yet often he observed her watching him in a perplexed and doubtful way, as though she strove to grasp some new idea of him. He waited patiently, in silent hope.

"Have you said anything to your adopted daughter of our discoveries through the papers in the packet?" he asked Mr. Carruthers one evening.

"No, I have not. It is enough for me to feel sure she is my grandchild. I dare not risk telling her at present, for fear of agitating her."

"Do you not think, if it be so, that it might help her now? I would not leave a stone unturned to assist her memory. I think we ought to try."

"No, Herbert, no!" Mr. Carruthers spoke decidedly. "I shall wait still, in hope that Stella's memory may return quite naturally. Remember

that I will not have it forced. Act as though your recent meeting with her were the first."

Mr. Carruthers put his hand kindly on Lisle's shoulder as he spoke.

"I still hope for the best. Be patient, Herbert, yet awhile. You will be rewarded soon, I am sure."

Lisle said no more to him. He still felt unconvinced that silence was the best. In his deep, loving understanding of Clare's feelings, he longed to aid her slumbering memory. He saw with anxious pain the futile struggles that it made to wake. He realized to the full the strain it must be on her. But there was ever present in his heart the dread that it might be a mere coincidence, because she did not know him. He scarcely dared to hope for his own happiness. As for her dreams, he thought they might come of her own mystical responding love. It would be fatal to take any immediate step, lest there should be a mistake.

Lisle was troubled now by her constant change of attitude towards himself. At times she instinctively was drawn to him; at other times she shrank away, avoiding him.

"She sometimes seems to shrink away from me in doubt and pain," he thought. "At times, again,

seems simply happy and contented in my company. At times she seems as though almost on the point of recollecting me. If I dared but believe!"

Carried away once by his own overwhelming feelings, he spoke to her again of his affection for her. She heard him in a state of agitated doubt.

"I do not know yet who I am, nor whence I came. Till I met you my loss of memory did not much trouble me. But now I long to recollect what went before we met. I would fain know my own past, fill up the aching void, and bridge the gap between my past and present. Until I can do this, what can my future be to me? I seem to have awakened partly since we talked of this before."

After a long pause, she added timidly—

"What was your meaning, when you told me that you had no right to love me? Yet now you speak to me again, of love."

"I cannot answer yet," said Lisle in agitation; "one day I will tell you all, the truth—and you shall be my judge!"

CHAPTER X.

Ned Martin, coming to Colombo from the hills on business connected with his Tea Estate, met Lisle again by chance, to his delight; and, reminding him of his promise to visit him, persuaded him to return with him to the hills on a visit to his plantation. The Carruthers being included in his cordial invitation, the whole party made the return journey with him to the hills.

Mrs. Martin was delighted at their arrival at her home, where she saw few visitors, and she welcomed them with fervour. They spent some days in viewing the estate, and took great interest in the production of the tea, which Martin was at some pains to explain to them.

They enjoyed their visit much, but Lisle's long-suffering patience was being hardly tried. As he felt sure the end was drawing near, he could scarcely keep from risking speaking, and telling Clare the truth. One afternoon he came upon her sitting on the verandah with Mrs. Martin's pretty children

round her. She had the youngest baby in her arms.

“Mr. Lisle, this is my accidental namesake,” she said happily, turning to him where he stood musing in the sunshine. “Is not she a perfect little picture? She has the loveliest grey eyes—do look at them!”

Lisle quickly turned his head, and looked instead at her own bright eyes and smiling mouth, and delicately flushed and beaming face. He stood gazing silently at the happy little group. A sudden strong emotion checked his utterance when he would have answered her. He turned hastily aside and walked away, leaving her standing there amidst the laughing, chattering, children, with the baby nestling in her arms, the others gathered closely round her. How sweet and motherly she looked, he thought, the pretty baby holding round her neck with its plump little hands and arms, its small, fair face pressed lovingly against her darker one. The picture lingered still within his mind long after they had gone off with the ayah.

Clare was left alone with him on the verandah. She feared she had unwittingly vexed him, and was troubled. She had cast anxious glances at him as the children went away. But Lisle looked straight before him, never glancing at her. He felt he could

not trust himself to speak. He stood gazing out upon the blooming garden with intent and meditative eyes. She went straight up to him, and addressed him timidly.

“What is the matter, Mr. Lisle?”

“I was thinking of the years of happiness that I have missed,” he responded, suddenly turning round to her; “the years that might, that should have been, but never have been mine. It struck me with fresh force this afternoon!”

“I do not understand,” she answered timidly.

Bertie suddenly took her pleading face in both his hands, and looked deep in her troubled eyes.

“Do not worry, darling! You will understand when you remember—not till then. My dearest, you must first remember your own past!”

Bertie bent his head and kissed her hands, and went hurriedly away alone into the garden. And he left her standing there looking intently after him in wondering reflection, as he disappeared from view amongst the fragrant orange trees.

That evening Lisle entered the drawing-room, to find Clare sitting there alone, working at some delicate embroidery. With a sudden restless movement she rose hurriedly in silence, going towards the conservatory opening off the drawing-room.

Lisle followed her with a fast-beating heart, and stood watching her anxiously. She did not seem to observe his presence there, but almost unconsciously began to pick the rich blooms from a plant in a flower-pot, seemingly absorbed in deepest thought. A large wire-basket with some rough kind of trailing sprays hung near.

“Take care!” Lisle said, suddenly.

He was too late. The fragile sleeve of her dainty evening dress had caught in a trailing spray, and was almost torn off to the shoulder as, startled, she hastily turned round to him. And on her white and beautifully-moulded arm, he saw the strange and unaccountable disfigurement of an old and ugly scar, that set his heart to beating fast and wildly, till it seemed as though he could not bear the pain of it.

“Stella!” he cried then, as he had cried before, on his first meeting with her. And this time there was a strain of vivid, sure and joyous recognition in his agitated tones.

He stepped quickly to her side; and Stella’s eyes met his. But now she did not turn away from him. Not thus, indeed, had she regarded him before. And the rich colour deepened in her clear cheeks as her eyes sank before his ardent, searching look.

"How did you get this scar?" demanded Bertie, breathlessly, and almost roughly; though his hand was gentle as he lightly touched her arm.

"I do not know," she faltered. "It seems to me I have had it always. I cannot remember when, or how, I hurt myself."

She seemed perplexed anew, and the old clouded troubled look that now Lisle knew so well, crept to her face once more. She seemed to make an effort to cast back her memory in some old past forgotten channel. She appeared white and strained as she stood leaning against the lintel of the conservatory door, looking straight in front of her with dreamy and unseeing eyes.

"Can you trust me, Stella?" Lisle asked with infinite tenderness, as he gently took her hand.

She gave a sudden start, and gazed at him in perplexity.

"Trust you? Ah! I seemed for an instant to grasp a memory—a fleeting glimpse of recollection came to me that you asked that of me once before in some old and long-forgotten period. I once promised in some dream that I would trust you, Bertie!"

Lisle marvelled in himself that she did not seem aware how readily his name came to her lips. And

she took it naturally and unthinkingly that he should call her Stella.

“You did not keep your promise to me in that dream—will you keep it now? It will be doubly precious to me if you trust me now whilst you walk in the dark, dear. It will make full amends for all your lack of faith before. Trust me, Stella, rest on me; leave all to me!”

“If I do so, Bertie, I must do it blindly, as you say. You tell me that I failed you once before. Have you aught to tell that could recall my wandering remembrance?”

Lisle was silent here. He felt too much to speak. Stella looked at him appealingly. Her usually intelligent bright mind refused to aid her to fill up the blank. That she in a measure certainly remembered now, was evident. But the strange hiatus was still unfilled, unbridged.

“Do not worry, dearest,” Lisle said, tenderly. “Day by day it is still coming nearer to you. Even now it is on its way to you. Let your truant memory wing its way back to you in its own time.”

Stella drooped towards her unknown husband as he drew her nearer, resting on his love, nestling in his close embrace, wholly trustful, wholly comforted. And there was the dawn of awakening remembrance in her face.

CHAPTER XI.

On the day following, the little party rode on horseback in the direction of a beautiful lake that was within the distance of a pleasant ride. Near it was a ruined bungalow with some romantic history attached to it. It nestled in a paradise of palms and flowering shrubs of infinite variety; gorgeous crotons, and innumerable creepers overgrowing roofs and broken pillars, and climbing the neighbouring trees, which they bespangled with their lovely blossoms. After investigating the old bungalow, they went further to view the lake. Calm and beautiful it was amidst the smiling scenery around. The clear cool water glistened in the sunbeams, filtering through the network of some interlacing foliage near which they stood; for above the water, shade was cast by a cool, delicious screen of over-hanging boughs. Birds twittered amidst the foliage, where there was many a nest. The grass around was fresh and green, strewn with the plentiful sweet flowers that nature scattered freely over with a liberal and loving hand.

They stood here wrapt in meditative thought. For all was restful peace, where they could almost have thought their foot was first to tread the green, undesecrated turf.

On their way back Mr. Carruthers went on in advance with his companions, leaving Lisle to follow with his wife. Neither of the two behind had observed the gathering storm-clouds, nor the rapid disappearance of their companions, as they rode on together side by side, wrapped up in their own thoughts. Stella was the first to awake from **her** abstraction.

"Where are the others?" she asked suddenly, looking hurriedly around her as she spoke.

Lisle started from his reverie.

"They have doubtless ridden forward. We shall overtake them soon."

"I fear a storm is gathering," said Stella, as a heavy drop of rain splashed on her cheek, followed by a smart shower.

She involuntarily quickened her horse's lagging pace, and Lisle glanced upwards.

"It is just about to break on us in its worst fury," he exclaimed in great dismay, as he thought of his companion.

"The others are evidently far ahead of us, and must be nearly home!"

"We cannot catch up with them before it breaks on us. See, here is temporary shelter close at hand. This deserted bungalow will at least protect us from the violence of the storm. Let me help you quickly to dismount."

She acquiesced silently, and they approached the ruins, where Lisle secured the horses lest they might be frightened and seek escape. They had not long to wait before the storm had burst in all its violence. With downcast eyes Stella sat on a portion of a broken column that had once supported the verandah, as she hearkened to the warring of the elements without. And Lisle stood by her, fixedly regarding her as he observed that the connection of events—the present agitation of the storm, and their past adventures, years ago—appeared to excite some serious approaching change in his wife's mind.

The storm without redoubled in its fury, the frightened neighing of the horses mingled with its fierce discordant raging. As a louder peal of thunder rent the startled air, vibrating hoarsely, Stella started to her feet with an involuntary exclamation, as a stone fell by her with a crash, from the ruined wall. Bertie sprang towards her in alarm, and

threw his arm about her. She quickly turned to him, and their eyes met.

The moment held her spell-bound in a sort of fascination. She was as one who heard a half-forgotten melody ring in her ears once more—as one to whom the faint, sweet, subtle scent of long-departed violets came back again with some forgotten dream. And an ecstatic sweetness that was yet keen pain, filled her whole soul and mastered all her being.

Then, with a quick movement, she drew herself away, and gazed inquiringly at him. The questioning look in the depths of her dark eyes became an expression half of expectancy and half of fear. Her breath came quicker from her parted lips; her delicate rose-colour came and went; her bosom heaved, as with some strong and painfully-suppressed emotion. She released her hands from his, then sighed, and awakened slowly from the spell. The look of expectancy was still within her eyes; the fluctuating colour came into her cheek once more, and then left it paler than its wont; her manner grew constrained and calm.

Her manner had recalled Lisle to himself. A heavy shadow fell across his face. He had suffered much and deeply in the past. And yet, he thought, the presence of his wife—the fact alone that he in

truth had found her—should surely seem sufficient for the time to heal his old aching wound and set his heart at rest.

Stella passed her hand across her brow, looking straight before her in a dazed and half-awakened way. A new and ardent questioning had now apparently begun within her woman's soul. An indefinable knowledge came to her, and yet seemed to elude her eager mental grasp. There was a curious hesitation in her air; a strained, intense and anxious look was in her eyes, as though she feared to trust her own impressions.

Lisle had observed her closely, with a tender, strong and pitiful compassion for her struggling recollection. Did she indeed remember him at last?

His expression as he gazed at her, appeared almost to alarm and startle Stella. She turned away from him, and resumed her seat on the fallen column.

The furious raging of the tempest was subsiding; the thunder and the lightning-flashes now had nearly ceased.

She suddenly turned back to him again, in agitation, speaking breathlessly.

“We have met before in real life—in some time

of trouble, even danger—we were friends. Tell me if I am right, for I distrust myself!”

Lisle came closer to her side, with a fast-beating heart. The time so ardently desired by him, so watched and waited for, had come at last.

The noise was over now, beyond the steady beating of the rain.

He bent towards her, resting his hand gently on her shoulder, and speaking in low, clear tones, that he might not startle her.

“Let me tell you a story, Stella,” he said tenderly. “It may assist your memory.”

She glanced at his quiet face, and, meeting his look as quietly, she bent her gaze on the ground and waited for him to proceed.

“Stella, I had a wife, who was very dear to me.”

His hearer glanced up startled, with a kind of terror. Lisle caught the look and hurriedly went on.

“She has been missing for the past three years.”

Stella caught her breath, as though in pain, and awaited his next words with closely-strained attention.

“I met her first when travelling in France.”

Stella made a sudden gesture that perhaps might mean remembrance. Her face and attitude expressed a keen and vivid interest and fixed attention that were not lost on the observant man. He resumed his story:

“There was a break down on the road; the carriage in which she and her grandfather were travelling was upset; and coming up behind them at the time, I took them on with me to the nearest stopping-place.”

Stella looked up breathlessly as Bertie paused, and made an impatient gesture that he should proceed.

“On our arrival there, her grandfather was discovered to be seriously ill. It was not very long before he died.”

Bertie Lisle glanced tenderly, with never-failing and absorbent interest, at the wistful, closely-attentive face of his listener. Her cheek was flushed, her breath came quicker from her parted lips. Had his tale as yet conveyed the facts to her own mind?

He quietly resumed:

“I had married Stella Verne before he died. On the evening of a dull grey day we arrived together at our English country home. I had brought my young wife directly there, none of my few ac-

quaintances knowing as yet of her existence, or of my return. We were received by Mrs. Grayson, my old housekeeper."

Stella made a sudden hasty movement, but she did not speak.

"Later on that evening, James Weston called on me. He was my solicitor, and my dead father's old and valued friend. Stella at the time was absent from the library where we were sitting. On returning to the room a little later, and unnoticed by us both, apparently she overheard a few hasty words from Weston's lips, and my own hasty answer to my friend."

Lisle's hearer threw her head a little back. Her cheek had crimsoned with a sudden vivid flush, perhaps of indignation. And a sudden fire was in the sparkling eyes she raised to his.

"You were speaking, then, of her, when she was absent from the room?"

Lisle glanced at her, and reddened, as he bit his lips, and nodded. He went on hurriedly, with new agitation in his hitherto calm tones.

" 'A girl whom you met travelling, both friendless and unknown!' my solicitor was saying, with undeniable vehemence, as she entered. 'O Lisle, what have you done? You have simply irrevocably

ruined your own life and prospects, in order, in your quixotic generosity, to help an unknown girl; who is most probably, some scheming and designing adventuress! You may live yet to repent the step you took."

Lisle's face flushed deeply here and he paused for an uncomfortable second as he glanced at Stella's now averted head. He drew himself together with an effort, and went on:—

" 'How could I act otherwise than as I did?' I questioned in reply, with answering heat. 'She was quite alone. I was her only friend in a strange place. And, being obliged to consider her position there, I was so circumstanced that I had to act at once. Otherwise, of course——' "

Lisle paused again; and when he next resumed, his voice was agitated, even pleading in its tones, as though he prayed his listener to hear him patiently.

" 'Had I but had time to finish the uncompleted sentence on my lips, all would have ended differently. For my wife would certainly have grasped my meaning then. But at that moment we both saw her standing in the doorway, holding back the heavy crimson portiere with a nervous, trembling little hand—and I at once stopped short.' "

Stella now had turned to him again, and she was listening with new and trembling eagerness, with quickened, panting breath, and feverishly-parted lips. Lisle noted this, and his voice became more passionately pleading than before; as though he prayed for her patience and attention to the end.

“Weston, seeing Stella now for the first time, was greatly struck with her appearance. I could see that he regretted his own hastily-expressed opinion. We glanced hurriedly at one another, changing countenance, and both of us uncertain as to whether she had overheard or not. But she came forward quietly. Though pale, and reticent in manner, she was apparently so indifferent and unmoved that he, at least, was reassured; and he took his leave of us soon afterwards.”

A new, deep note crept into the man's voice, as though he prayed now for her trust, and her belief in him. He drew a step nearer to his hearer, and fixed his earnest gaze directly on her face.

“After his departure a deep uncomfortable silence fell upon us, left alone together—a silence that was broken first by my young wife.”

Stella once more made a sudden movement, half rising to her feet. But she sat down again, her gaze held fast by his.

"She had risen to her feet," said Lisle, "and now stood opposite, at a little distance from me, at the side of the wide hearth. One hand rested on the chimney-piece, nervously playing with some trifle there; but when she spoke her tones were clear and even, though subdued. The girl seemed to have become a woman all at once.

" 'I overheard Mr. Weston,' she began, 'as I came in. It was a revelation to me when I overheard his words. I have been dreaming, Bertie, only dreaming, after all—a bright and happy dream! I have awakened now. Mr. Weston was right in what he said. You should not have married me. You were too impulsive—far too generous and noble-minded.'

" 'I started to my feet,' said Lisle, "and went to her. 'Stella!' I cried vehemently, 'what do you mean?' With gentle peremptoriness she raised her hand to silence me, and then went on:—

" 'Only your solicitor and Mrs. Grayson know the truth as yet, and your old faithful servants. They will be silent for your sake. It seems to me that the rash act can be undone so easily. I have but to leave you—I can earn my own living, far away—and the law will help you. I need never trouble you again!' "

Lisle broke off for an instant, almost overcome with his emotion.

"Was she right?" he questioned gently, when once more he felt that he could speak.

"I cannot answer yet," said Stella, in a low and trembling voice.

"Stella, you are speaking like a foolish child," I responded very gravely," Lisle went on. "'You must know that what you propose is quite impossible. And what if I, your husband, Stella, do not sanction it? You are my wife, remember—have you considered me, or my wishes, in the matter? Hear me, Stella! Let me reason with you!'

"She responded very sadly—'What is there, indeed, that you can find to say? Are you seeking plausibly to cover your regret?' 'My regret!' I exclaimed impatiently, 'Have I ever said one word to you, ever shown by word or act, or even look, that I regretted it? I can scarcely understand your attitude to me. Can you recollect your promise to have unquestioning faith in me? What have I done, that you should doubt me now?'

"Ah, Bertie," Stella interrupted hurriedly, "she should indeed have trusted you—with, or without a promise!"

"Do you say so, Stella?" Lisle asked gravely.

"You have given me a promise—will you keep it now?"

"Bertie, tell me more!" she answered low.

"A momentary hesitation came upon her as I gently took her hand in mine," said Lisle. "But the recollection of my own unfinished answer to James Weston was still rankling in her sensitive, proud mind. She withdrew her hand with coldness—even indignation—as she answered—

"The case is slightly altered now, I think."

"Ah, Bertie, she was wrong! She should have trusted you," Stella said again, in deeply-shaken tones.

"Do you pass judgment on her? Well, the time is not far distant now, I know, when she will trust me, Stella!"

Stella looked up earnestly in his face.

"You have not told me all."

"Her face flushed deeply," Lisle responded slowly, "and she turned it from me, trembling, shrinking from me a little, as I placed my hand gently on her shoulder. Another instant, and the barrier of the poor child's pride might have broken down, and a thorough and happy understanding might have come between us."

"And it did not come?"

"No. She asked me for a certain packet that had been in my charge, and I was telling her I could not find it—that I feared it had been lost, or stolen—as indeed it proved to be. For on our journey to the town, in France, on our way home, we had met with an adventure at an old deserted house, where we stopped for the night; Stella being wounded by a blow that she had bravely warded off from me. Just then, as we were discussing it, a hasty knocking came at the library door. Releasing my wife's hands, which I had taken closely in my own, I turned impatiently to see who might be there."

"Ah! if only that interruption had not come!" said Stella.

"It was from Mrs. Grayson, with a verbal message for me—'Mr. Weston's messenger has come,' she said, 'and he brings some important documents, which Mr. Weston would like you to look over immediately. He will detain you but a short time, sir. He wants to make some arrangement with you for his master.'"

"'Stella, will you wait here for me?' I asked her pleadingly, as I reluctantly obeyed the unwelcome summons. 'I will hurry back to you.'"

"I was detained, however, for some time; and my young wife had ample time for sad reflection

sitting there alone. From what followed afterwards, I believe she went upstairs and dressed herself for walking, after penning a few last hasty words to the husband whom she had made up her mistaken mind to leave. She said something in her note, poor child, of having done me a great wrong, and of wishing it undone. She was young and inexperienced," said Lisle, with wistful tenderness, and did not seem to understand she might be doing me a greater wrong in thus leaving me without my knowledge and my full consent."

"Did you get her letter soon?"

"I found it late that night. When I returned to the library, I thought she had got tired of waiting for me, and had gone up to her room. I longed to follow her at once, but had my papers to look over first, and I thought they would not take me long. It was late, however, when I went up to bed. And I found her gone!"

"And that was the last you knew of her?"

"The very last. She must have passed out by a side door that led into the grounds, whilst I was returning to the house, after accompanying my inopportune and unwished-for visitor to the gate, for a few last words with him. I can fancy that I see her drawing back from the pathway, and pressing

closely up against some sheltering bushes in the dark shadow of a well-grown tree. For I remember hearing a rustling sound as I approached. The moonlight fell full on my face as I passed by. I have often thought how Stella may have looked her last on me, ere, springing forward when I had gone by, she hurried forth on her own desolate, and henceforth, solitary way. This," said Lisle, concluding sadly, "is the story of my life! I have been vainly seeking for my lost wife ever since that night. I have continued my search for her in spite of disappointment and perpetual failure. I have dared to hope that I have found her now!"

He spoke the last words very softly, very lovingly, and remained then silently observing her, with mingled hope, and love, and sadness. Stella slowly turned away her head, bent thoughtfully. Then, starting to her feet, she threw back her head as one would do who was shaking off some heavy, clinging dream.

"Bertie! You have told me my own story!"

She met his eyes with her own clear, unclouded ones, the occasional melancholy, brooding look gone for ever now.

"Dearest Stella, tell me all that followed your departure," Lisle said eagerly, as he impetuously grasped her hands.

"I went straight to the railway station that we had so lately left together. How I got there, I do not know—but I walked all the way. I passed unnoticed, and was only just in time to board a train that was leaving there for London."

"You had money with you? I feared so desperately for you, darling, without funds."

"I had a little money, very little; but enough to pay my way."

"What happened next? Did Mr. Carruthers find you? Stay—I am forgetting your accident, and loss of memory—the hiatus is still in part unbridged for you."

"Then," she said, "there were the busy throngs of people at the terminus, and the dense, crowded streets. The unceasing sound like that of the murmuring sea; the blinding, flashing lights. Then came a dreadful shock, and after that—a blank! It has all come back to me."

"And what of Mr. Carruthers, dear, and your new life?"

"I just woke up, and found myself in my new life, with the old one swept away."

"You were happy and contented, Stella? Had you no dreams of me?"

"I was contented, Bertie, till I met you at the

Mainwarings. I accepted the position as I found it, and was merely glad to rest!"

"There is more to tell you, dearest, that you do not know. But I must leave that part to your adopted father. It is only fair to him."

"Now tell me of yourself," she answered, clinging to him, as he held her fondly in his arms.

Bertie put her from him for a moment, holding her gently by the arms, as he regarded her happy face.

"Why did you leave me, Stella?" he said passionately. "For over three long weary years I have been seeking you. How could you inflict such cruel suffering on me?"

His tones betrayed the living pain that still touched his heart.

"I feared you did not truly care for me," said Stella softly. "That you had acted only out of pity—from a sense of honour—that now you might come to regret your rash act at no distant time. I dreaded what your friends might say of me—remember Mr. Weston had already termed me scheming and designing—a possible adventuress! Could I endure that, Bertie? No, I wished you to be free. I was inexperienced, remember, when we first were married; afterwards my eyes were opened to the

facts, and it made a woman of me in one moment! It was for your own sake I left you, Bertie, though, indeed, I know I was mistaken, now!"

With a deeply sorrowful and pleading look, she silently besought his pardon. Taking his hand in both of hers, Stella bent her head, and gently raised it to her lips.

The man glanced quickly at her. The colour flickered softly in her cheeks, and a half-shy, half-happy, exquisitely-tender smile played on her lips. The full knowledge of the truth had come home to her heart indeed. Her eyes flashed with full recognition of him, and her face flushed deeply as, without a word, he caught her rapturously to his heart.

"We have loved each other from the first," said Lisle at last, each not knowing who the other really was. And, after all, you unknowingly redeemed your early promise to have faith in me. Stella, how is this?"

"Before, I did not love you as I love you now!"

"Ah, yes—I understand," Lisle answered thoughtfully. "With perfect love comes perfect faith. And our love is perfect now! When I saw the scar upon your arm, my own heart told me passionately that I might believe at last, that it was you!"

"It still seems like a fleeting dream to me," said Stella, "but for this ugly scar upon my arm to prove its truth!"

"A scar I dearly love!" said Lisle; and pushing up her sleeve he kissed it tenderly. "It will constantly remind me, darling, that in all probability you saved my life at your own risk that night."

They sat down together on the fallen column, side by side, hand clasped in hand. The storm had lulled long since, but they still sat there, all unconscious of the time.

"See, the storm is over!" Lisle exclaimed at last, as, putting his arm about his wife, he drew her gently out on the verandah of the ruined bungalow.

"We must go home," she answered softly, clinging lovingly to him. "They will be anxious, dear, if we delay too long."

Lisle got the horses out and putting his wife on hers, he stood beside her for a moment, with her hands both clasped in his, and his face upturned to her.

"The storm is over, Stella," Lisle repeated with a happy smile, as she returned his earnest gaze with a tender, trustful one.

The raindrops sparkled like bright diamonds amidst the foliage, and the sun came out and smiled on them as the storm-clouds slowly sailed away.

REPORTED KILLED

REPORTED KILLED.

“I am grieved to learn you are returning shortly to South Africa,” said Mr. Ward to Major Ross, when, over the dessert, the conversation had become more personal.

“Yes,” the Major answered slowly, “my leave of absence has almost expired now.”

“I shall be disappointed of my hope of having you pay us a visit in our home,” said the old gentleman.

“I often wish that Geoffrey would think now of marriage, and leave the Army to settle down near me in town,” Mrs. Ross said plaintively.

“Oh, there’s plenty of time for that yet, little mother,” her son said hastily, with a slight change of countenance.

“When do you leave Sydney?” questioned Mr. Ward.

Major Ross did not reply. His attention had now wandered, and he did not notice that he was

addressed. He was gazing straight across the table at Phyllis Ward, who sat beside Jim Sturrock, his chosen friend; as though he would fain read in her countenance how she had taken the news of his projected departure for South Africa. But apparently the girl had taken little heed of what was passing.

At the end of the evening the Major told his mother that he wished to walk home quietly with Jim Sturrock, and smoke a last cigar. He gave her his arm to lead her out, and put her carefully in her cab; then turned to Sturrock, who was waiting for him on the pavement near. A certain amount of suppressed excitement was in Jim's manner as they started to walk home together.

"Geoffrey, what do you think of Phyllis Ward?" he asked at once, in a breathless kind of way.

"Why should you ask?" returned the Major lightly, yet with some intention underlying his light manner.

"The fact is, Geoffrey, that I take a special interest in her. She is the most charming girl I have ever met!"

Sturrock's earnestness was by no means lost on Geoffrey Ross.

"You care for her?" he asked impulsively, with a white face and a pang at his own heart.

"I love her, Geoff! I want her for my wife," the other answered simply. Then he added, in intense, low tones: "Were I lucky enough to gain her love, I should be the happiest man on this wide earth!"

"Then you do not know, as yet, if she cares for you?" asked the Major soberly.

"I do not," the other answered gravely. "But of course I shall take my chance, as others have to do! Geoffrey," he added slowly, "have you ever been in love?"

The Major drew a long, deep breath, but did not answer him.

"You do care for a woman, Geoffrey," Sturrock said impulsively. "Have you no hope?"

"I have no hope—she is not for me," said the Major.

"Have you spoken to her? Have you failed?"

There was a long pause here, and he repeated his inquiry anxiously.

"I had to take my chance, as all men have to do," the Major answered enigmatically. "It is my destiny."

"What hurry, Geoffrey? Take a little time. It may make all the difference."

"Time, in this case, can make no difference."

“Do you believe love is spontaneous—that it cannot be won?”

“I believe love is spontaneous, and scarcely to be won. My theory is that souls are made for one another; although sometimes they may not meet, but seek each other through this life in vain.”

“Geoffrey, what do you mean to do?”

“I shall go back to Africa,” he answered sadly. “My sick-leave, which has already been extended, is nearly over now. I meant to sell out of the army altogether if I married, and to settle down on my own property.”

“Your mother will be grieved—she will miss you when you go. I know she quite adores you.”

“My mother? Dear old lady! I will return to her one day perhaps, when time has healed my wound.”

* * * *

Phyllis Ward next day was wandering alone in the garden of her suburban home, amidst a perfect blaze of flowers. It was a fresh, clear morning, bright and sunny, and the small, winged insects fluttered round in happy, unconscious irresponsibility, alighting occasionally on the fragrant blooms. So Geoffrey found her when he called.

"Miss Ward," he said, advancing gravely, "I have come to say good-bye. You know I'm going back to Africa," he added sadly.

Phyllis started, and drew in her breath with a fluttering little sigh.

"Give me a rose as a remembrance, Phyllis," said the Major presently, "for we have been friends, I think, and this may chance to be our last farewell."

He spoke with suffering that somehow passed her by, and made him blind to the expression of unmistakeable pain upon her face. Phyllis plucked a sweet, red rose, and raised it to her lips; then silently held it forth to him. Geoffrey took with it the gentle hand that held it forth, which he retained lingeringly in his clasp for one brief instant, with a sudden rush of tender pity for the girl. He felt some intuition in his soul that Phyllis somehow shared his pain with him.

"Do not grieve—for it will all come right," he uttered softly, with a grave and wistful smile.

The girl glanced quickly at him, then she fixed her sad gaze on the ground.

He dropped her hand, and turned silently away; and left her standing there alone in the perfumed garden, in the midst of blooming flowers. And so

Geoffrey passed out of her life, as he thought, for ever.

Sturrock met him on the street as he was hurrying home, and for an instant the Major tried to pass him by. Sturrock detained him for a moment. A sudden partial understanding came to him.

"Geoffrey," he faltered, "do you wish to be alone?"

"Yes—I must be alone for a short time. Come to see me in the afternoon—but leave me now." He pressed his friend's hand hurriedly, and went upon his way.

Sturrock, calling on him in the afternoon, was shown at once to Geoffrey's room. He was surprised to find him busily engaged in packing, his possessions strewn around him. Ross, having recovered now, in looks at least, his former self-possession, came forward quickly.

"Jim, I am leaving here at noon to-morrow. I have secured a berth in a steamer just leaving Sydney. I am going back to the Cape without delay."

Jim regarded him with sympathetic understanding. "Geoffrey, may I go with you as far as Albany, and so be with you till you really leave Australia?"

The Major hesitated for an instant. "No," he said at last. "I would much rather go alone."

"You will wait until your leave expires, however? Perhaps you may yet care to have me, later on?"

"I am returning to the Cape without waiting for the expiration of my term of leave. I feel it is the best thing for me, in my present state of mind. I want to get away. But not a word of this to my mother, Jim. It would cause her infinite and unavailing pain."

"At least you will let me stay with you until you start; and see you off afterwards?"

Ross did not reply at once. He looked long and earnestly on Sturrock's face. "Yes, Jim," he said gently, "stay with me, and let me see the last I can of you. We may never meet again on earth!"

So, later on, the two men stood together on the deck of the ship that Geoffrey was to sail in. She was about to start, and most of the people who had come on board to bid their friends farewell, had already gone ashore. The two men stood awhile in silence, watching the last of the shore-going people leave the ship. Then Geoffrey, at the last, turned round to Jim, and warmly grasped his hands.

"God bless you, Jim! May you be very happy with your chosen wife. This is probably our last good-bye!"

“Not for ever, Geoffrey! You will return to us one day, I trust and hope!”

The Major paused awhile before he answered him. His gaze was fixed across the distant sea. Then, slowly, with a far-away expression in his eyes, as though he saw far-distant scenes beyond the view of his companion:—“Yes—one day I will return to you—unless I am killed out there!” he said.

A week had passed since Major Ross had gone, when Sturrock called on Phyllis, whom, to his content, he found alone.

“Miss Ward,” he said nervously, “I came here to-day to seek an interview—will you hear me patiently? I love you, Phyllis, with all my heart and soul. Is it possible that you could learn to care enough for me to be my wife?”

Reluctantly she raised her downcast eyes, and looked at him. And a kind of horror and repulsion crept slowly into them. Sturrock suddenly stopped short, regarding her with an intent and searching gaze. He felt some kind of change was taking place in her. He could not understand the meaning of it, and it cut him to the heart.

Almost violently she withdrew her hand from his appealing clasp. “I cannot listen to you,” she exclaimed excitedly.

It struck Sturrock now, and with a cruel pang,

that this change had come in her since Geoffrey's departure from the scene. Was it possible that she had cared for Ross, and that his own chance with her was now quite spoilt? For the moment his new feeling towards his friend had clashed with friendship, and was almost turned to a blind, unreasoning anger, and the bitterness of jealousy.

"Why am I become repulsive to you?" he asked bitterly. "You have always seemed to like me hitherto!"

"You are not repulsive, Mr. Sturrock," said Phyllis penitently.

"But you cannot care for me. Is it quite impossible?"

"Impossible! Oh, quite impossible. I am sorry—oh, so sorry,—and I am grateful to you, Mr. Sturrock. But indeed I cannot care for you."

"Would time make any difference, perhaps?" he asked half-heartedly, and with imploring gentleness. "Dear! I would not hurry you. I would wait patiently. Can you not give me hope?" Oh, the intensity of pain, the hopelessness in the man's voice.

"Oh, no; do not press me, please! My answer must be final!"

"Do you care for any other man?" he faltered hesitatingly.

Phyllis started, regarding him with wonder. "You have no right to ask me that!"

"I have a right—the right of loving you."

"There is no one else—how could there be any-one?" she answered presently, after a long, painful, doubting kind of pause.

"Ah, Phyllis, if you would only marry me!"

"Forgive me, Mr. Sturrock. I am so grieved to bring this pain on you. For I like you very much; have liked you from the first. We have been friends since we have known each other. We must be friends still." She offered him her hand, with a grieved, contrite expression. It was the nearest expression of real feeling he had ever seen since he had known her. And though he did not take the hand she offered him, he watched her earnestly, and even with a little new-born hope. But his new-born, wavering hope was cruelly dashed to earth again.

"Never speak to me of this again," she said imploringly.

"You are sure—quite sure—there is no hope for me, either now, or in the future?"

"No. I am sure—quite sure. Oh, why spoil our friendship thus?" she cried excitedly, with a touch of passionate reproach. "You are still my valued friend, if you will have it so."

Sturrock grew very pale, and his gaze dropped to the ground. "Friendship can never satisfy the heart that starves for love!" he muttered sullenly. Then, after a long pause, in intense, low tones, he added: "Yet still I am your friend for ever, Phyllis!"

* * * *

Major Ross had long since returned to Africa, and Sturrock often thought with sad, foreboding retrospection of his friend, when he recalled their parting. Coming down one day to breakfast, he took up the morning paper carelessly, and idly scanned the news. A startled exclamation suddenly escaped his lips. The colour left his cheek, his very lips grew white, and he scanned the page he held with strained attention now.

It contained the startling news of an engagement in South Africa; news of a victory won by the British at great cost; a glowing account of bravery, and of the chivalrous and noble courage and devotion of one Major Ross especially. It was followed by a list of killed and wounded. No! There could be no possible mistake. It was Geoffrey Ross whose name was painted in such rich and glowing colours; Ross whose name was foremost, with all honour, in the list of killed.

Sturrock crushed the fatal paper in his hands with a sharp pang of poignant anguish. "I must go at once to Mrs. Ross. I must keep back the paper from her till the fatal news is broken to her gently. Good heaven! it will kill her if she sees it suddenly, without first being prepared?"

He threw the paper down, went to the outer hall, and seized his hat, to hurry to her house without delay. A servant had just finished cleaning the brass-work, as he approached the door. A maid was crossing the hall. He entered without ceremony, scarcely noticing her surprised looks.

"Has your mistress seen this morning's paper?" he asked breathlessly.

"No, sir, it is still there. It has not been opened yet." She pointed to the hall table, where it still lay, folded.

"Your mistress must not see it—if she asks for it, you must find some excuse for withholding it from her. Is Mrs. Ross up yet?"

"She generally breakfasts in her bedroom, sir. But I think she will rise this morning earlier than usual. She has had a restless night."

"Well, keep the paper back from her till I can see her."

"She usually has it taken to her with her breakfast-tray."

Sturrock stood hesitating. He scarcely saw his way to asking for an interview so early. He feared to alarm Mrs. Ross. He tried to find some good excuse to offer. But he was saved the trouble. Mrs. Ross having heard someone was there, now rang her bell. The maid answered it at once. She soon came back again.

“My mistress asked me who was there? I told her Mr. Sturrock. Then she said: ‘I will go down to him. He will remain with me for breakfast?’ And, please sir, will you kindly step into the drawing-room whilst you wait?” ,

He went in at once, and walked restlessly about the room. Mrs. Ross soon entered. Her white face was pathetic, and it wore a strange expression. She came straight up to him, and held out both her hands as though with mute appeal for sympathy. Sturrock took them tenderly and reverently in his own.

“You have come to tell me something, Mr. Sturrock?”

He tried to speak, but a lump rose in his throat and choked his utterance.

“Shall I tell you what you have come to say? You bring the news to me of Geoffrey’s death!”

Sturrock started violently, looking at her in astonishment. "Why, how is this—you have not seen the papers yet?" he faltered painfully.

Mrs. Ross continued slowly: "Here is my son's latest letter to me—it was written on the eve of battle. It tells of a perilous engagement they expected would take place. And now that you have come to me, I know my son is killed!"

Sturrock could not answer. With trembling fingers he took from her hand the letter that she offered him, but his eyes were dim, and he could not read; the words swam before his distressed gaze, and they seemed dim and hazy.

"Geoffrey died as he desired to die," he said brokenly at last. "Died gloriously and bravely on a victorious battle-field, and, as became a noble-hearted gentleman and loyal soldier. By all he is accounted a most brave and honourable man. He lived and died in honour—beloved, revered by all."

"That is my comfort now," Mrs. Ross said eagerly, with pride and triumph, infinitely more touching to the man's heart than tears. "His memory will be revered by all. Yes, he died nobly, on the victorious battle-field!"

The room-door opened now, and Phyllis stood before them on the threshold of the door. Her face was full of pain and tender sympathy. And yet there was a brightness in it, strange to see!

“Dearest Mrs. Ross, I came at once to you!”

Phyllis ran to the old lady's side, and putting her arms about her lovingly, pressed her warm lips against her cold white cheeks. The glow of spurious excitement, pride, and triumph, began slowly now to leave the bereaved mother; it flickered faintly for a moment more, and then went out. She broke down suddenly at last.

“Ah, my dear,” she faltered through her tears, “I hoped for a long time to have had you for my daughter. Though he said nothing to me, I once thought that Geoffrey cared for you. I had hoped to see him happy, and his children round my knees before I died. My dear, I hoped that you would marry him, and keep him safe for me!”

Sturrock had uttered a sharp exclamation as she spoke, like one on whom some sudden painful light had burst; and Phyllis drew a letter from the bosom of her dress.

“Geoffrey sent me this!” she uttered softly;

still with strange brightness on her face and in her eyes.

The short note was indeed in the Major's hand, scribbled hurriedly, as though in stress.

"Phyllis," he had written, "the chances are I may be killed in this engagement, and so it can be no disloyalty to Jim, to tell the truth. I loved you dearly when I came away. My heart can tell the bitter pain it cost me not to speak! My blessing on you, and on one who is perhaps your wedded husband now!"

As Sturrock would have turned to Phyllis, there came a sudden interruption of their interview. A sound of hasty ringing at the front door bell, the sound of hasty feet approaching the room door; and Mrs. Ross's maid rushed in with a cablegram for Sturrock, which he opened with shaking fingers, fearing dire tidings. His face cleared suddenly. Then he held it forth to Phyllis, forgetting, in his relief, the risk of shock to her and Geoffrey's mother.

"Reported killed——" he murmured; "a mistake made by the officers——Geoffrey has fought gloriously, and he was badly wounded; but he is still alive, and on recovery from his wounds he will be drafted home again to Mrs. Ross—and you!"

“So Geoffrey loved me, after all,” said Phyllis softly; the underlying brightness now appearing as the sun shines forth from clouds, as she smiled through her tears, “and it is my happiness to know it now, by his dear hand!”

ON OCEAN WAVE.

ON OCEAN WAVE.

The cabman had put down the last of the Gladstone bags on the ground, outside the crowded wharf, and Molly paid his fare. He touched his hat to her, and instantly drove off again, to pick up another passenger.

“Why is there not somebody here to attend to us?” said Mrs. Charlton, with some astonishment. “Captain Ross promised me solemnly to be on the lookout. Which is our vessel, Molly?”

Molly looked round the shipping in bewilderment.

“Aunt Susan, are you certain the cabman has put us down at the right wharf? I wish I had gone with you when you took our passage.”

“Molly, these places look so much alike! If you don’t see the ‘Albatross’ then the man has made a mistake about the wharf!”

“I certainly don’t see the ‘Albatross.’ ”

"It's too bad," said Mrs. Charlton, helplessly.
"Well, Molly, what are we to do?"

Her niece looked round the crowded wharf again, where busy men were too much engaged with the shipping to notice them. She stepped forward to stop a man who was passing from a crowd, and questioned him eagerly. He removed his cap, and scratched his tousled head in doubt.

"You're a-wanting to go aboard the 'Albatross?' Well, that wessel don't belong here, anyway. You'll likely find her round on another wharf."

He pointed vaguely over his shoulder in the distance, with a dirty thumb, and hurried off.

"Will you call a cab, please?" ventured Molly, attempting to detain him. But he was already out of hearing.

Mrs. Charlton, suddenly collapsing, sat down on her tin bonnet-box.

"Molly! How can you laugh? It's no laughing matter, surely!"

What good would it do to cry? Now Aunt, don't fret and fume. We must just make the best of the situation. If you'll stay here with the luggage, I'll try to find a cab."

"There's that young man again!" said Mrs. Charlton suddenly, with apparent irrelevance.

Molly turned her pretty head to look. A young man was slowly sauntering by. She remembered now that he had slowly sauntered by already several times, within the last few minutes, whilst she was speaking to the other man. Womanlike, she took in his whole appearance with one swift, searching glance. She decided that he was a seaman, in his well-worn, shore-going clothes, come for a holiday ashore. A pair of frank grey eyes met hers. He coloured, hesitated, went off hurriedly a few steps, and then returned again as suddenly.

“Pardon me,” he said in some confusion, removing his straw hat with his toil-roughened hand, and displaying his curly brown hair, “can I assist you, ladies? You seem to be in some kind of difficulty, surely?”

Molly now decided that he appeared to be respectable, and even educated, though undoubtedly belonging to the working-class. She decided, also that he could be trusted.

“And what a nice voice he has!” she thought.

He had glanced at the small pile of luggage as he spoke, and at Mrs. Charlton’s portly form seated despondently on the bonnet-box, and he was apparently taking account of the busy, crowded wharf, and their seeming lack of personal attendance.

“We’re going aboard the ‘Albatross,’” said Molly, frankly explaining the situation to this new coadjutor. “We are going on a trip to Japan, there and back, for Auntie’s health. And we have come to the wrong wharf.”

“Couldn’t you go over to the ‘Albatross,’ young man, and tell Captain Ross to come for us at once?” demanded Mrs. Charlton, a sudden ray of hope illuminating the dark night of her mind.

“Why shouldn’t I get a cab, and see you safely aboard myself?” the young man smiled.

“Oh! if you only would!” cried Mrs. Charlton, clasping her tightly-gloved plump hands together on her ample bosom, in an ecstasy of rapturous eagerness.

He left them on the wharf, and after a short delay returned in the four-wheeler he had captured. In a few minutes their unknown benefactor had put the ladies and their luggage into it, and was climbing to the box. They soon arrived at the right wharf, and the young man helped out the passengers, and hastily paid and dismissed the driver, with a covert glance at pretty Molly.

As they approached the schooner, a couple of rough heads were presently thrust over her side, and were immediately joined by others, one of them

the Captain's, an expression of unqualified surprise depicted on his red and weather-beaten visage.

"Tosh bless us! It's the passengers!" a seaman cried.

"Hullo, Mrs. Charlton!" cried the Captain of the "Albatross." "Why, we didn't expect you ladies here for a full hour to come!"

"We left home too soon," called Molly, "and perhaps it was as well, as we went to the wrong wharf! Can we come aboard now, Captain Ross?"

"Bless your heart, of course you can, Miss Charlton. Your luggage came all right, and is below in your own cabin. Here, Sam and Tom, just get the ladies and their baggage up!"

"Now, mind that bonnet-box!" cried Mrs. Charlton anxiously, as an over-willing seaman seized on it to hoist it aboard. "You'll drop my best bonnet in the water, if you're not more careful! Ah! now you've got it upside down."

Mrs. Charlton was got up on deck with difficulty, uttering little shrieks and yelps of fright, owing to her state of nervous terror over the rather primitive and narrow gangway.

Molly paused before she followed Mrs. Charlton. Her purse held in her hands, she turned to the young man. To her dismayed astonishment,

she met with a look of fiery reproach as she fumbled for a coin, and she glanced at him inquiringly.

"Oh, please!" he exclaimed in a low voice, and with a gesture that bade her put by her purse again.

"But we owe you for the cab, at least," persisted Molly, as she held out a coin to him. "You paid the driver."

"You owe me nothing—it was my whim to bring you over," he returned, with slow deliberation.

The girl drew back her hand in consternation. The look that came in his eyes now, made her feel as though she were detected in some crime, and she blushed to the very roots of her pretty and daintily-dressed hair. Her hand dropped to her side with a sudden feeling of helplessness.

The young man seemed suddenly to recollect himself. He now held out his hand for the coin he had at first rejected. He looked at it in an odd way as it lay on his palm.

"You'll let me thank you for your kind assistance?" said Molly, rather timidly.

"Ah! that's another thing," he smiled.

Molly turned to get on deck, for they were waiting for her up above. The young man suddenly swung himself up after her. A little group was

standing on the deck. The new-comer cast one quick look around, and then, deliberately advanced towards the captain of the schooner.

“Captain! Is there room aboard for another passenger?”

“Young man, there’s not. I guess we’re pretty full!”

A slight pause here.

“Well—couldn’t you take on another hand?”

“I couldn’t do it, Sonny,” said the Captain, winking, with a facetious shake of his grey head.

The young fellow disconsolately went off again, and reluctantly prepared to walk away from the ship’s side. He appeared to be cogitating deeply. Shortly afterwards there seemed to be a sort of scuffle on the vessel’s deck, the cause of which he could neither see nor divine, though he heard faintly a distant murmuring as of excited voices. He wondered what could be amiss, as he walked slowly on.

He was suddenly hailed with a loud shout.

“Mate ahoy! Stop!” cried the Captain, after his retreating figure.

He instantly stopped walking, and looked back.

“I must send one of my men ashore,” the Captain called to him. “Will you take a man to the Hospital, that’s just been injured here?”

The young man instantly returned, and was soon standing on the vessel's deck again. A seaman was lying there in a huddled heap, surrounded by a little group of perplexed and concerned-looking shipmates.

"There's been an accident," the Captain said, "and my second officer's been hurt. I can't take disabled hands with me this trip."

He added gruffly, in a grumbling tone—"Now I suppose I must needs go ashore to find another mate to take his place. Dear, dear! We shall be sailing after time—a thing we've never done before! Are you still in the same mind you were in a while ago?" he added suddenly. "You know we're going a trip to Japan."

"Wait!" cried the young man eagerly. "I'll give you proof that I'm competent!"

He and the Captain walked aside for a few minutes, talking earnestly together. They soon came back again.

"Yes, I'll take you in his place, Mr. Brown," said Captain Ross. "You'll do. We'll see about the papers. Will it take you long to get your outfit?"

"I'll be as quick as possible," the other said. "You'll only have to delay the ship a day or two."

A cab was called, and Captain Ross then bade the injured man farewell, with a kindly look that

belied his former seeming hardness, as he slipped something into his hand.

"Mind you're well by the time I come again," he said.

Two days later Mr. Robert Brown reappeared on board the "Albatross" as second officer. There was a look of suppressed triumphant eagerness in his face as he went jubilantly off to the performance of his duties.

A few days after they set sail, Mrs. Charlton and her niece sat up on deck together in their comfortable deck chairs, in the fresh and bracing breeze, enjoying the fine weather. Molly was reading, and her aunt sat with her everlasting knitting, that accompanied her everywhere, on her ample lap, as she lay back in her chair. She had a vague idea that she was helping missionaries by making red woollen comforters for the unclothed heathen, who resided in warm climes.

"There's that young man again!" said Mrs. Charlton languidly.

Molly raised her dark-fringed eyes at the sound of the passing step, as the second officer passed by. She coloured, and looked down again upon her book. Presently he passed again. Once more he met her eyes. She shifted in her seat impatiently, and

frowned. The sailor caught the pettish movement and the frown, and bit his lip as he passed on.

"Whatever makes that young man pass by so often?" Mrs. Charlton said reflectively. "My dear—I hope I've made no impression on the poor young fellow's mind!"

"Come for a walk with me, Miss Molly," said the Captain, coming briskly up to them. "Cheer up, Mrs. Charlton, you'll soon get your sea-legs now. But it's going to freshen a bit soon, I think!"

"It's fresh enough already!" said that stout lady plaintively. "It won't blow any harder, will it, Captain Ross?"

"Oh! only a capful of wind," Captain Ross said cheerily. "Keep up your heart, ma'am—you'll soon get used to it!"

"I don't want to get used to it!" said Mrs. Charlton, faintly. "Molly, don't leave me here alone. Help me down to my cabin, dear."

Captain Ross assisted the poor lady tenderly below.

"Who is the new mate, Captain Ross?" asked Molly hesitatingly, a little later, as she kept pace at his side on the ship's deck.

"On my word, I don't know, my dear. It's enough for me that his papers are all right, and that

he understands his work; and glad enough was I to get him at short notice in poor Adam's place. So far as I can see," he added, with a shrewd twinkle in his eye, "you brought him aboard yourself!"

Captain Ross was called away just then by his first officer, and Molly, blushing deeply still, leant meditatively against the railing, watching the sea-gulls flying and dipping in the waves.

"Pardon me, Miss Molly," a low voice said beside her, "but you've dropped your book, and I have brought it to you."

Molly turned round hastily, to see Mr. Brown. His hand touched hers as he gave up the book. She snatched back her hand as though she had been stung. The book fell to the deck between them, and they both stood looking at it. Then his grey eyes met the brown ones for a moment, in a steady gaze. The sailor drew a long, deep breath. He looked at Molly in a way she could scarce understand. They were alone together, in a retired part of the deck.

"Your shoe-lace is undone," he said, suddenly and softly. "Let me tie it for you!"

Without waiting for permission, he knelt near the shapely little foot, and tied the lace. He was rather a long time in doing so, and his strong brown hands were trembling as he fumbled at it clumsily.

Then, still kneeling at her feet, he looked up at her, a look of pleading adoration in his eyes. Molly read the look, and, brushing past him, she turned hastily away, and went below.

They had been for some time at sea, when, one evening, she stood alone on deck in a retired nook, in the cool night breeze, gazing across the sea in the dim light.

"Miss Molly, Mrs. Charlton bade me bring you up this wrap," said Bob Brown's voice, breaking in on her reverie. "She was on her way to you—she could not find you, and she feared you might take cold!"

Molly turned sharply round on him in sudden anger. "You're always watching me, and following me about!" she flashed at him.

Robert Brown stood gazing at her quietly in the dim light, apparently without surprise, without protest.

"It's true that I followed you 'board ship," he said. "When the luck came in my way I seized on it. It was my only chance!"

"Your only chance—of what?" Molly regretted the words the instant they were spoken.

"My only chance of winning you!" the sailor answered boldly.

Molly answered nothing, but stood, breathing

fast, as though she had been running. Bob put his fingers lightly on her shoulder, with an appealing touch.

"I love you, Molly—and you know I do!" he said.

Still Molly answered nothing.

"I loved you from the first—I followed you aboard!" said Bob.

With an involuntary gesture the girl half turned to him, but, stung by some sudden thought, she drew quickly back again.

"You're only a common sailor!" she cried angrily. "How dare you tell me so?"

"My father was a sailor, but he was an honest man. Thank God, I've no cause to be ashamed of him!"

Molly suddenly burst into tears.

"Don't cry, Molly!" Bob said, with pleading pathos, as he took her hand.

For a moment the trembling little hand lay unresistingly within his own. Then she snatched it away from him.

"Oh, go away!" she sobbed; "don't speak to me. Never speak to me of this again!"

"You don't mean it, Molly?"

"I do!" She stamped her shapely little foot in her impotent wrath, and rushed away to the safe refuge of her berth.

"Hullo, Miss Molly!" said the Captain, meeting her on the way down, "where are you going to in such a hurry?"

"For the next few days she carefully avoided Bob, who, on his part, made no further attempt to speak to her, though he occasionally crossed her path in the performance of his daily duties. His usual bright cheeriness was gone, and he appeared preoccupied and serious as the days wore on, and the time drew near at hand when the end of the trip must come.

So far, the voyage had been unusually calm and prosperous. They were near the end, when a gale came on, which hourly increased in force and fury, beating down upon the "Albatross" with cruel, terrific power. The hatches were all battened down, and the two women placed for safety in their cabin, whilst all hands worked hard above. They were obliged to cut away a good part of their sailing gear in order to save the ship; and, when a great shout arose that she had sprung a leak, the stoutest hearts amongst them trembled for their safety. The Captain's order to man the pumps was instantly obeyed, and all hands worked with might and main to save

the "Albatross," and their own lives. Captain Ross stood at the almost useless helm, until he saw the necessity of going to supervise his men, when he called Bob to take his place, that he might hurry down below, and find out how far the leak had spread.

The weary, creaking vessel plunged on in the foaming sea, each deep dip below the waves seeming as though it would be her last. Yet still she rose again and struggled on. The first officer was returning from below to join Bob at the helm, when the doomed vessel gave a terrible lurch over on to her side, and the waves dashed over her, overwhelming Bob with a cloud of blinding spray, and, rushing in a violent flood upon her decks, apparently swept all upon them into the foaming sea. When she righted again the hapless mate was seen no more.

How Bob lived through that night, he never knew. He had lashed himself fast to the helm, and bravely tried to do his duty; but the helm was utterly useless now, for the vessel no longer obeyed its guidance, and he knew not whither they were driving before the storm. In the black darkness of that dreadful night, he felt that she was rushing madly onward. Then came a fearful shock, and the "Albatross" stood motionless, the wild waves beating over her. He could only conjecture that they had

struck upon the coast, or on a rock, and wait as patiently as he could for the tardy morning light to come. And, as he stood there in the utter darkness, clinging to his frail support, the warring elements around still beating on him mercilessly, through it all fresh thoughts, new fears, were roused in his mind, for Molly's safety.

Ere long Bob became aware that the gale was going down considerably. Exhausted, he sank down, and fell into a slumber. The dreary hours passed slowly by, and at length the faint grey light of dawn began to come. Waking later, by its steadily-increasing light he saw a woeful scene. The dismantled, broken vessel, with her decks swept bare, was driven fast on some half-sunken rocks. For the time she was safe from further harm, but there were signs that told his practised eye that she might break up in another gale.

He undid his lashings, and called aloud, but no voice answered him. He made his way below, and searched about, and called again. A weak voice answered him, and he found the Captain, lying with a broken arm, upon the planks. Bob set the broken arm for him with rough and ready skill, and helped him to an easier resting-place.

“Captain Ross! I feared you had been swept

into the sea with poor Richards, in last night's storm!"

"I was saved by a miracle. I was carried the length of the deck by the wave that swept over us. Half drowned I was, but I escaped with bruises and this broken arm. See to the women, Bob," the Captain added, anxiously. I was on my way to seek them, when I got that fall. I must have lain unconscious for some time."

Bob hurried to their cabin without delay. Hearing a faint cry within, he set his shoulder to the cabin door, and forced it open. A pathetic little figure rushed at him.

"Molly! Mrs. Charlton! Oh, thank God, you're safe!" said Bob.

"Bob, dear Bob! I thought you had deserted us!" cried Molly.

Mrs. Charlton pounced on him with frantic haste, and held him forcibly in a desperate embrace, lest he might escape again, and leave her to her fate. Soothing her wild fears, Bob quickly disengaged himself from her detaining hold, and turned to Molly. In an instant her hands were closely folded in his own.

"Could you find it in your heart to think that of me, Molly?" he asked reproachfully. But a

tender smile was on his lips, for the "dear Bob" that had unwittingly escaped her lips.

"Where's Captain Ross?"

"He's safe, but has been hurt. I fear the other men are gone. Poor Richards was swept into the sea. Let us go to the Captain now."

Bob's anxiety for their general safety was renewed, for he knew not how long the ship might hold together in a fresh, rough sea. Mrs. Charlton was too subdued by the terror of the awful night she had passed through to utter complaints, and she limply clung to him. Molly was looking very white, and seemed exhausted, but was calm and quiet. Food and hope restored them. Bob got the Captain and the women up on deck without delay. He had searched throughout the ship, but could find no traces of the other men. The hold was full of water, but the firm wedging of the ship when she was driven on the rocks, had stopped the leak.

The haze had lifted suddenly as the sun came out, and he could see that they had struck on some lonely, rocky island. The heaving bosom of the sea still rose and fell in the restless agitation that storms ever leave behind them, and he watched it anxiously.

"Depends now on the weather, I should think," the Captain said, in a low voice, so that the women

might not overhear; with a keen look of perfect understanding of the situation in his brooding eyes.

"One boat's safe," said Bob, in answer, "though she has been injured by the storm. I can repair her with a small outlay of trouble. The others have been swept away, apparently."

"I'll get the ship's books, Bob," said the Captain soberly; "and tell the women they'd better put a few things together, in case we have to leave the ship. And we must see about the stores."

Bob set to work at once to repair the injured boat. The women sat near, watching in unbroken silence, which was only interrupted by the swish and lapping of the water against the doomed ship's side.

"I don't quite understand the situation here," Bob cogitated, as he worked. "Why should this one boat be left in safety, and the other gone?"

"The seamen may have taken it," returned the Captain slowly; "though I can't believe that any of my men would desert, and leave us to our fate, when they could save themselves!"

"They may have left the ship between the darkness and the early dawn," said Bob, "thinking that the rest of us had perished in the storm."

"But they'd have shouted for the possible survivors, ere they left!"

Bob shook his head, as he worked on.

"We might not have heard them, if they did. You were in an unconscious state; the women were too far below; and I was then in my exhausted sleep."

"Molly!" said Mrs. Charlton, suddenly, "how little did I think what we were coming to, when we first set foot on the deck of the 'Albatross.' How long are we to stay here, in this dreary place?"

"Dear Aunt, we should be full of gratitude that we are saved. And we have food supplies. Remember poor Mr. Richards, who was swept into the sea. Think how it may be with the poor sailors, who are now adrift, or drowned!"

"We must make the best we can of it, till a vessel comes this way," Bob added cheerfully. "Mrs. Charlton, don't lose heart like this!" Mrs. Charlton shuddered.

"How long will it be before a ship comes here to take us off?" she asked, distractedly.

"How can I tell? A few hours, maybe. A few days, or weeks, perhaps. Any day it's not impossible that a ship may approach near enough to sight us, if we signal her. We must keep a sharp look-out!"

Early the next day, Bob descried a ship approaching slowly in the distance. Even as he sig-

nalled her, in great excitement, he could see that her course was already set for them. He eagerly called his companions to the ship's side. She came near, and nearer yet, and then dropped anchor at some little distance from the wreck. Then a boat with two men in it put off from her. A well-known face looked up at them from the stern as she drew near. It was high tide, and the boat got pretty close. One of its occupants caught the rope thrown to him, and the man soon climbed aboard the wreck, and grasped the Captain's proffered hand in both his own.

"Sam!" the Captain cried, "what does this mean?"

"Captain Ross! Thank God!" cried Sam, with strong emotion, continuing to grasp his hand as though he could never let it go again. "We feared as you was washed overboard—is this a miracle?"

"It seems like one, indeed," said Captain Ross. "I was unconscious when you left the ship. Though I was not washed overboard, I had come near to it. I've been knocked about, and a bit injured, as you see. You rascal!" he exclaimed good-humouredly, "so, after all, you hadn't deserted us? You must needs explain the situation to me, Sam!"

The sailor approached the subject in a shame-faced way, half nervous, half jubilant.

“Captain, it’s little I thought to see you again! Two of us was swept overboard, the cook and steward; and we believed as all t’other souls aboard ’ad surely perished in th’ storm, when the few of us as was left took to the boat in first grey light o’ dawn. We shouted first, but none answered us, an’ we daren’t delay, for we feared th’ ‘Albatross’ might break up shortly, in another heavy sea. We ’ad sent a man below to look for th’ ladies, but he told us there was no signs o’ them. Leaving of the vessel at our risk, we got into the course the ships would take, an’ th’ ‘Norseman’ picked us up some way at sea. The Captain o’ th’ ‘Norseman,’ at our pleading, turned out o’ his course to see if any soul were haply left alive upon th’ wreck, though we ’ad but little hope o’ sich a chance.”

The excited Mrs. Charlton was laughing and crying all at once, in her intense relief and joy at being rescued from the wreck. Her fears of being forever stranded on that lonely spot had been most real to her. They made preparation now to leave the wreck, and board the “Norseman.” With unprecedented difficulty the poor unnerved lady was got down into the rocking boat, and placed in timorous security on her unsteady seat. As Molly descended after her, Bob caught her in his arms. For an instant the girl seemed to nestle there,

against his heart; then she shrank away from him, drawing coldly off as he released his hold and placed her on a seat.

“Poor old ‘Albatross!’ ” sighed Captain Ross, with dim and troubled eyes, as the boat swung over the water to the “Norseman.”

They were received most kindly by the jovial Captain there, and with all signs of joy by the other men of the “Albatross” who had been saved.

Bob was reserved with Molly when he came aboard the “Norseman.” He had meditated on the girl’s constraint and coldness. He resolved to withdraw himself completely from her now.

“Wait a bit,” he said, detaining her as she was going below. “I’ve something to say to you, Miss Charlton, and it may as well be said now.”

Drawing her aside to a quiet nook, he added seriously—

“I want you to forget what I said to you aboard the ‘Albatross,’ before the storm.”

“You mean,” asked Molly, “that you take back what you said?”

“Do you take back what you said to me?” asked Bob, with slow deliberation.

Molly coloured deeply, but did not reply. For a moment she looked fully at him, with a gleam of anger in her eyes.

"I mean," said Bob, "that I want you to consider it as not being said; and to part friends with me. Miss Charlton, is it a bargain?"

Smiling, he held out his hand to her, and Molly put hers into it, silently. He held it so a moment. Then, turning on her heel, as he released it, the girl walked hurriedly away. But he had caught a gleam of something in her eyes that looked like tears. There was a subtle shade of something in her manner that did not escape the observant, lynx-eyed Bob; if he read it aright, he thought, it was not altogether unallied to disappointment. He watched her out of sight with infinite tenderness and hope.

The "Norseman" was on her way back to the port that the "Albatross" had lately started from.

Time passed on, the end of the voyage had nearly come, and Molly felt, with infinite dismay, that it would soon be time for them to part. There were but a few hours left. She timidly drew near to Bob one evening, where he stood looking meditatively over the crested waves and out to sea.

"The 'Norseman' will soon sight land," she said, striving hard to speak with unconcern, though her heart was beating fast.

"In an hour or two, at most," Bob returned indifferently.

"I suppose," she added, with an uncertain

little smile, "that, when we land, we shall each go our own way, and probably never meet again."

Bob did not reply, nor did he look at her. But he was listening.

"Bob—you remember what you said to me on board the 'Albatross?' You asked me if I took back what I said——"

"I asked you to forget," he answered slowly, still looking straight in front of him with steady stare.

"Are we to part?" asked Molly, helplessly. Then she suddenly broke down.

Bob turned at last, and caught her to him, pressing his face to her wet cheek.

"Molly!" he breathed, "are you really crying, dear, because we are to part? Think well before you answer—do not trifle with me! What you say now, I will hold you to forever!"

Molly, clinging to him, answered softly in his ear.

"And you don't mind, darling, that my father was a working-man, and that I am myself a toiler of the sea? I'm not a poor man, Molly; I can keep my wife in comfort, if not luxury."

"Oh, I don't care for that—and it's nothing to me, now, if you're a working-man. Oh! can't you

understand—I loved you very dearly all the time—
it was my foolish pride. Dear Bob! I was only
angry with myself, for loving you!”

SADDANATH'S LEGACY.

SADDANATH'S LEGACY.

“Your daughter comes!” said Saddanath Mookerjee, in unctuous tones to a tall, thin man, whose irresolute, weak face had a worn and harassed look this afternoon.

They sat together on the long verandah of Mr. Morton's bungalow, with its whitewashed stucco pillars.

Saddanath was a short and self-indulgent looking man, whose sleek, complacent countenance, despite his affecting English dress and English custom, bore, nevertheless, strong traces of the native.

A fair, slight girl approached them from the garden, her hands filled with fragrant blooms. As her blue eyes fell on her father's friend she flushed up suddenly, then her eyelids fell, and her face grew pale and sad.

“Come, Julie,” said her father, listlessly, “come here and speak to Mr. Mookerjee, who has been

waiting here to see you this half-hour. I was on the point of sending Ramo to seek you in the garden."

"The girl came up to them with evident reluctance, as Saddanath Mookerjee rose to his feet and bowed to her in his best English fashion.

"Wellcome!" said Saddanath.

With an appealing glance at her father, she unwillingly suffered him to take her inert hand in his distasteful grasp. A sprig of orange-blossom fell from her loose bouquet on the ground. Saddanath stooped for it, and held it in his thick fingers.

"I ask this favour, Missie Julie. I shall treasure itt. And itt iss my wish to please you. I take itt as a sign, an omen off the future!"

He spoke pompously, and bowed again, his fat hand holding the orange blossom to his heart.

Julie glanced at Mookerjee, still with that distasteful, shrinking look on her pale face; but, despite her deep distress, her lips twitched with an irresistible, and hardly-suppressed, desire to laugh.

"I must go in to Ramo," she said hastily, to her father. "I will rejoin you later."

As her graceful figure moved away, the gaze of both men followed her until she disappeared from

view. The father's face expressed dissatisfaction. But Saddanath's beady eyes glistened with gratification.

"This iss important business," he said. "I will relieve you off embarrassments the day I celebrate my marriage. Then you may ask me for the documents. Eferry thing will then be easy for you. Thatt will be the last off your responsibilities. Oh, yess, certainlee, the verrie last. I shall loose much money by itt. But your daughter will be happy with me, take my word!"

He gave his usual unctuous, irresponsible laugh.

The older man seemed stung. He made a repugnant, hopeless kind of gesture, as though he brushed something off, and then sat sunk in a dull, irresponsive silence, his weakly-brooding gaze bent on the ground, his inert hand, with the half-smoked cigar between the fingers, hanging listlessly at his side.

"You will approach your daughter with the matter," Mookerjee said finally, as he was taking his leave. "You should be gratefull for itt. Before I come again, I shall expect itt off you."

As his stout figure vanished in the distance, Mr. Morton rose, his face convulsed as by a sudden,

feeble, and impotent wrath, and he tossed his cigar away from him amongst the hibiscus bushes. It was as though he tossed the thought of Mookerjee away with it.

Mr. Morton did approach his daughter, nevertheless, on the matter, that same evening.

“Julie, you have guessed that Saddanath Mookerjee desires to marry you. You know our circumstances. He is immensely rich. And his one thought is of you. I think you would be happy with him, child.”

The man's weak lips were faltering over the lie. His shamed eyes fell before his daughter's steady, seaching gaze. She heard him, scarce surprised, yet freshly shocked and shaken.

“And Frank? Oh, father! father!”

Julie said no more, but went silently away.

Saddanath came next day with a packet in his hands, containing strings of rare and priceless pearls. He cast his moist, appreciative eye on the girl's white, shapely neck.

“These pearls, they will become you, Missie Julie! You shall have diamonds allso. I am not poor man.”

The girl shrank away from him as he laid his plump hand on her shoulder, with the air of a possessor. Saddanath saw and resented the coldness of her manner. He had already been displeased with her reception of him in the light of an aspiring suitor, one encouraged by her father.

"That iss not right!" he said, half angrily. "And you must wear the niklass. You will soon be my wife."

Julie stole away as soon as possible to her own room. She tore the pearls from her fair neck, and bade the ayah put them safely by.

"Ramo! Has Juddoo brought me answer from the Sahib Frank?"

"Memsahib, Juddoo has not come."

"Watch for him, and bring him to me when he comes."

Meantime, Saddanath Mookerjee was holding serious converse with the erstwhile master of the bungalow.

"I have knowledge off the matter. Itt is sirrious. And you saw her coldness to me. I deplored to feel itt. Itt iss a pity thatt this should be so. There iss another thing. We must oblige him to resign his hope."

"What can we do?" asked Mr. Morton helplessly.

"I mean well by Missie Julie. My intention, itt iss good. But all my friends have been already spikking off itt. I have heard other people spikking off itt allso. Itt iss generally known. There iss no help for thatt. I shall prohibitt him. I shall protect my rights. The right iss still remaining with me."

Before he left the bungalow Saddanath spoke with Bhungi, Morton's servant, as the ayah stealthily passed by.

"Look thou, worthy one, if that 'buzat'¹ Juddoo, servant off the Sahib Thurston, comes to gain admittance to the 'mem,' do thou refuse him entrance. And, moreover, take no 'chit'² from him, nor suffer itt to pass. Neither suffer Ramo to have speech with him. 'Sumja!'³ Juddoo, son of jackals, has not been here in my absence?"

"Juddoo, thatt son of mud, has not been here," said Bhungi, salaaming.

Ramo returned to her young mistress with a mysterious expression on her dark face.

"Has Juddoo come?" asked Julie anxiously.

"He not see Memsahib. Juddoo will destroy

1, worthless creature; 2, letter; 3, Do you understand?

the Sahib's 'chit,' lest itt fall into Saddanath's hands. Juddoo cannot spik with me, for he is watched by spies."

"Can'st thou find another messenger? Say I will give good present if he takes my message safely to the Sahib, and brings me a reply!"

"I will find thee messenger!"

And Ramo took the note and crept away.

Julie waited with feverish impatience until next evening. But, after a difficult and distasteful interview with Saddanath Mookerjee, who pressed her very hard, on his departure from the bungalow she hurried to her room, where the ayah awaited her with sympathy in her breast, but an impassive face; the burning anger in her bosom drying up the tears of fear and shame on her white cheek.

"Oh, Ramo, worthy one! Hast sent my letter safely to the Sahib Frank? Ayah, if thou lovest me, oh hasten, hasten!"

The ayah, coming nearer, crouched down at her feet.

"Missie Julie, itt iss gone now by safe messenger. I sent itt by isspecial messenger!"

"Was it Bhungi? Then bring Bhungi to me when he comes again!"

"Certingly! Certingly! Right away, Mem-sahib."

The ayah's silver anklets jingled as she went away upon her errand.

"Thou hast done well. Now keep thou watch on that crow's daughter, Ramo," said Saddanath Mookerjee to Bhungi, who was speaking with him, at this very moment.

Bhungi took the rupee that Saddanath gave, and salaamed solemnly, with an impassive face, but anger in his heart, for Ramo was his sweetheart.

"Thy commands shall be obeyed!" he said.

Nevertheless, when Saddanath had departed, Ramo came privily to bring him before the "mem."

Said Bhungi: "Are they made entirely of wood, these Engleesh? Do they not feel disgrace? Yett the old Sahib's face wears many wrinkles now!"

"Peace, pig! Peace!" said Ramo. "Whatt does itt matter to this slave?"

Then he had speech of Julie.

Bhungi entered her presence salaaming.

"Prissint! Memsahib! This slave has done thy bidding. Thou hast promised me iss small pris-sint! I carried thy 'chit' to the Sahib. Vary well."

"I will not give thee an anna, unless thou hast brought me back an answer."

"Certingly, Memsahib, certingly."

Bhungi held forth a letter in his hand, and took the rupee that she offered him.

“Behold the Sahib’s ‘chit.’ ”

“Thou gavest my ‘chit’ into the Sahib’s hand? How looked the Sahib when he had opened it?”

“As though he laughed, Memsahib. Yett was there sternness in his laugh.”

Julie dismissed the man, and read eagerly her missive.

“Knows Bhungi what the Sahib Frank has planned?” she asked the ayah, after some brief thought.

“He duss-sant know,” said Ramo. “Let Memsahib read itt within the ‘chit.’ Bhungi duss-sant know, Memsahib.”

“Simply, it does not appear. But he will send word again. The Sahib will let me know. Stay—what is this?”

She had found a hasty postscript on the margin of her note. Julie’s eyes were sparkling, but she said no more to faithful Ramo, who stood patiently watching her with an impassive face.

It was a dark and stilly night when a slight, shrinking form stole noiselessly forth into the garden, glancing uneasily this way and that, like a wild, hunted thing. When she reached the bottom of the

garden, creeping cautiously from bush to bush, as she came along she inhaled the fragrance of some hidden orange trees, and knew her whereabouts; and the gentle breeze brought her a faint sound out of the dusky night. Then came a low, clear whistle, followed by a faint whisper from a clump of palms.

“Julie! Are you there?”

The heavy fronds waved slightly in the dim light. Julie took an uncertain step toward the clump of palms. Against their dark outline, a man's figure stood in patient waiting. Then she ran up swiftly, and the man came forward and caught her in his arms.

“Julie! Thank God, I got your urgent message in good time! Your father——”

“Do not reproach him for the situation, dearest Frank! You know my poor father—how weak, irresolute, he is. And Mookerjee had got him in his power. He has taken up his quarters at our bungalow. And he would hesitate at nothing, now, to gain his ends. Oh, Frank! he reminds me of a cobra, with its helpless victim writhing in its deadly coils. Mookerjee is cruel and unscrupulous, relentless and unsparing, beneath that suave exterior. My father now is ruined and penniless. His honour is involved—it will perhaps be called in question. I was made

the sole condition, and the sacrifice, by Mookerjee. He is bent on marrying an Englishwoman of good family. But I could not have been that horrible man's wife!" said Julie shuddering, as she clung fast to him.

"Monstrous! Unnatural! Impossible!" cried Frank.

"God knows I do not blame the poor old man. Oh, my poor father! He did feel it, but he could not find the strength to stand by me. And I was all alone. And, Frank, I feared, for one wild, miserable moment, you might fail me too!"

But at the words, the man's arms enfolded her more closely, drew her nearer to him.

"Come away with me to-night! He does not deserve another thought from you. I have two horses here, and Juddoo holding them. Bhungi is keeping watch, for fear Saddanath has his spies about."

"I cannot desert my father," faltered Julie. Saddanath would punish him for me. Mother left him to me. I fought for him against himself as long as it was possible. But, oh! what could I do?"

"Present loss will teach him a useful lesson, darling; teach him to respect and prize his only daughter, and the honour of his name."

"I cannot leave my father altogether!"

"I do not ask it of you, though he is not worth it. Juddoo here shall bring him later on, and follow us. We ourselves will hurry forward to Colombo, and be married there directly on arrival. I will then arrange to set your father free of Mookerjee. And by way of compensation for the loss of you, the old bungalow shall be Saddanath's legacy," he added grimly, as he lifted her on her horse.

He was about to mount his own horse, when a slinking figure suddenly stole up to them.

"Whatt iss thatt?" said Bhungi, in a hissing whisper.

"'Chup-raho!'¹ 'Jao!' "² hastily responded Frank.

On the gentle stillness of the night there suddenly rose near them a wild, frantic shouting, as Saddanath and another man rushed out upon them from the shelter of some bushes near. Saddanath was soon stretched upon the turf, whilst Frank, with a knife-thrust in his arm, whipped up Julie's horse, and sprang up on his own saddle.

A wailing cry of a weak-hearted man's despairing voice, of "Julie!—Julie!"—rose on the night

1, Be silent! 2, Go!

air, mingled with the foiled and beaten Mookerjee's fierce curses.

They were answered by Frank Thurston's scornful and triumphant laugh, and the sound of rapidly-retreating horses' hoofs, as they spurned the ground; soon dying away into the distance.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Thurston went to England, taking with them Mr. Morton, now a broken wreck.

Saddanath Mookerjee did not appreciate his legacy. It had bitter memories for him. He suffered the bungalow to be neglected till it went to ruin. He intended some time to make a plantation there, unless he sold the land.

WASTED YEARS

WASTED YEARS

“Embarrassing, this—but it can’t be avoided now. There’s no time for reply, so he must come, as he wishes it.”

Mr. Wardell shook his head with a doubtful air, lapsing into an uneasy train of thought as he sat in his study, frowning heavily over a letter from his nephew that had come by the morning mail.

“He may arrive at any time,” he said, as he read it through again, and then glanced at his watch.

His attention was arrested by the sound of the front-door bell. Then he heard footsteps coming towards his study door, which stood ajar, so that every word the two approaching persons spoke fell distinctly on his ear.

“This way, please,” he heard his old servant say, as he walked before the visitor. “The master’s in his study; what name shall I tell him, sir?”

“Why, Andrew, have you quite forgotten me?”

responded a fresh, manly voice, with a ring of mingled surprise and pain in it that thrilled the listener in his study to the heart.

"Mr. Robert, can it be you? Now, heaven be praised!" old Andrew said in trembling tones. "I didn't know as you was expected, sir, and you've grown out of knowledge. It's good to see you home again, though it seems strange-like when you've been away so long!"

"Then my uncle did not get my letter, Andrew—or else I've followed it too soon?" said the frank, bright voice, with a slight fall in its cheerfulness, as the old man threw open the study door.

Andrew had not time to answer, for Mr. Wardell had risen to his feet, and met his nephew as he entered, his mingled feelings showing themselves strongly, in the unwonted working of his usually passive-looking face.

"Uncle James!" cried Robert, springing forward eagerly, and grasping the outstretched hand in both his own. "You got my letter, did you not—it could not have miscarried?"

"I got your letter, Robert, an hour ago," said Mr. Wardell, rather heavily, as he released his hand from his nephew's clasp, and turned back to his chair by the study table.

He re-seated himself, and looked very keenly at

him, taking him in at a rapid glance. On seeing him thus suddenly, he could not but feel a natural pride in him; an unsuspected, latent affection springing up for the bright and winning boy of whose companionship he had so long deprived himself. But he crushed the feeling down again within his breast, allowing the old, vague suspicion and dislike of him to take their place once more.

“Well, uncle, since I’m here, you’ll let me pay you a short visit?” asked the young man playfully, after an awkward silence; but with some hint of deeper feeling in his sportive tones. He went on hurriedly, as though with nervous effort to conceal emotion: “How are Mrs. Hayward, and Beatrice, our old neighbours yonder? How long it seems since I have seen them!”

“They are as usual,” said Mr. Wardell, with an air of something like relief at this touching on safer ground. “We may as well step across to see them, Robert, as they have not heard of your return.”

The old man rose, glad to escape the embarrassment of a *tete-a-tete* with his nephew, and led the way through the window opening into the garden. Crossing the sunny lawn, they passed through the gate connecting Mr. Wardell’s grounds with Mrs. Hayward’s. As they entered the garden surrounding the old rambling cottage where she lived, they

heard merry, childish voices, and presently a flock of sportive youngsters rushed at them. A bright-faced girl of eighteen came to meet them in unfeigned delight, followed more slowly by Mrs. Hayward.

"Gently, children," laughed Mr. Wardell indulgently, as they clung about him. "We'll see what there is in my pockets for you, presently. Come, speak to Robert first!"

Beatrice was already greeting her old playmate, with a touch of shyness in her manner that puzzled Robert. Mr. Wardell gently took her hand in his, his usually sombre, stern eyes softening as they rested on her dark and brilliant piquant face.

"So you remember Robert, eh? although he is so altered."

"Oh, he's not altered much!" cried Tom, now carefully inspecting him. "Say, Ted! Old Bob's the same as ever, hey? except for his moustache and his long coat."

"Well, you can chat together of old times, whilst I talk to your mother."

"Don't do that, Ted!" said his mother sharply, as her son plunged his hand inquisitively in Mr. Wardell's coat-tail pocket, as he turned away.

"I'm only playing 'Artful Dodger,' mother!"

"Well, I must get your father to thrash you, if you don't stop!"

"All right, mother! You've given me my choice," returned the youngster coolly. "I'll get my goodies now, and take the thrashing afterwards, all square!"

"There!" said Mrs. Hayward. "What can one do with boys like that? I must send them both to school."

"Hurrah!" cried Tom. "Then we'll get clear from petticoat government!"

Ted shook himself free from Mr. Wardell's detaining hold, and they ran off together to form plans.

"Ah!" sighed Mrs. Hayward. "They get beyond my authority at times. I don't know what to do with them! Even Dot becomes unmanageable. Last night I told her that mother knew best what was good for her. Afterwards I added: 'Put Dolly away before you go to bed.' 'This doll is my child,' said my little daughter sternly; 'and mothers know best!' I assure you, I was crushed!"

"It's only their high spirits and their native cleverness!" said the old gentleman, laughingly defending his sworn allies. "I wouldn't have them different—they have affectionate, good hearts!"

"The older boys are inclined to bully

Maurice," said Beatrice. "They were making such a noise one chilly night that I ran up to see what was the matter. 'We're only using Maurice as a warming-pan,' said Tom; 'and the little fool objects.' 'I'm being bullied,' sobbed the warming-pan. 'I've warmed their beds for them—and now I am too cold to warm my own!'"

"Well, send the older boys to school. They are old enough to go."

Here a sudden squeal rose from the twins, who had brought out a pet parrot in a cage.

"What is all this about?" asked Robert, stepping up to them.

"The parrot's mine," said Dot.

"No—it's mine," said Will excitedly. "Isn't it mine, mother?"

"Supposing you go halves in it," said Robert soothingly; "and then it will belong to each of you. You're twins, you know."

"Well, any way, I'll have the part wot talks so, tips—eye," said Will hastily.

"He means the head," said Dot, "and that's not fair. It's not fair, is it, mother?—he's only leaving me the tail!"

And, sitting down on the grass beside the parrot's cage, she wept bitterly, and would not be comforted, until Robert hastened to explain to them

his meaning; when they at length were pacified, and took the parrot off with them, to play amicably.

Mr. Wardell moved away towards the house with Mrs. Hayward, in earnest talk about his favourites.

"How I've missed you, Beatrice!" said Robert, turning to her as his uncle and Mrs. Hayward disappeared within the house.

He regarded her with the old affection, mingled with surprise. Could this fascinating girl, with the subtle touch of shyness showing beneath her new-found dignity and self-possession, be the same Beatrice whom he had known of yore? The merry romp, and sometime lively schoolgirl, with the long plait hanging down her back? Ah! what a change was here!

"We find each other altered," Beatrice said at last, with her old merry laugh, reading his thoughts in Robert's expressive face. "We're both grown up, you know; and that is all!"

"But our old friendship, Beatrice, will remain the same, I hope," said Robert earnestly, as he took her hand in his, with a quick glance at her frank face.

"Always, Robert," Beatrice answered gravely.

"You remember what I wrote you of the mys-

terious veiled woman?" he went on presently. "I've more to tell you of her now."

"I want to hear," she answered eagerly. "I've been so interested in her, Robert."

"In my last letter, you remember that I told you how she always sat in the same seat in church each Sunday, and that she often turned her head towards me. And I told you how I longed to see her face unveiled. Well, one day I met her on the street; she dropped a parcel unawares, and I picked it up. At the first sound of my voice she turned round hastily, and, throwing back her veil, for the first time looked earnestly at me. I found her face to be what I had imagined it. Refined and pure, and with a beauty of its own. I felt strangely drawn to her. Her voice, too, when she thanked me, touched me to the heart, it was so sad and sweet. She dropped her veil again, resumed her interrupted walk, soon passing from my sight. This is the last time I have seen her, Beatrice. Her seat in church is occupied by a stranger. She appears to have gone away."

"You may meet again, some day," said Beatrice.

Robert looked in on them next day, to propose an expedition. Tom was holding forth indignantly as he came in.

"Bridget's got engaged again," he said. "I don't blame Bridget for getting engaged, because she's a woman who must 'keep company.' But why did she look so awfully broken-hearted when the butcher broke their engagement?" he asked with intense disgust. "I wonder why he broke off the engagement?" Tom added reflectively.

"I once knew a lady," Robert said, "who basely attempted to rob her own best friend of a first-rate cook. Apropos of ill-gotten gains never prospering, this perfect treasure failed her at the last. She said that her young man had threatened to break off their engagement, as he would lose his tasty little supper if she went so far away. And he had dropped dark hints of transferring his affections to a rival cook."

"Aunt Jane says that folks who break engagements, and then get engaged to someone else, offer themselves round like refreshments," said Ted judicially.

"Then you are like 'refreshments,'" answered Tom. "You always danced with Fanny Smith till Amy came along. Before my birthday party, Bob, Ted looked so miserable that mother was afraid he'd been at the green apples. The pressing offer of some castor-oil brought forth an alternative confession. 'I was only thinking what a pretty girl

Fanny'd be,' said Ted, 'if she had only a nice nose. I'm afraid I'll have to dance with Amy at the party, because she's prettiest—but I like Fanny best!' "

"What an amount of happiness to depend on a pretty nose!" said Robert, joining in the laugh. "And what of Bridget—is she happy now?"

"First-rate!" said Tom. "She made me a cake all to myself, on the first strength of it!"

"You were always greedy," said his brother with disgust. "You never told me of that cake, nor offered me a share. I recollect a party we had once, when I went in, and you had been forbidden to appear, for punishment. He'd been prowling in his night raiment round the supper-table, Bob, in the dining-room, and was surprised in his unholy depredations on the refreshments there, by the sudden and unexpected advent of hungry visitors. He had no time to escape, so plunged beneath the supper-table for a hiding-place. When all were seated at the table, Tom crouched beside my feet, and, getting impatient of the prolonged repast, kept pricking my ankles with a pin, to make me hand him down supplies of cake."

"I say, Bob," said little Maurice, "Aunt Maria's coming soon, to stop with us."

"I thought she was nursing her sick brother, at his parsonage."

"What a comfort she must have been to him," said Tom. "She told us he wanted her so badly that she'd go to stay there for three months—but she returned home unexpectedly in about three days, looking very savage. It seems that Uncle Sam complained of her attendance, and he said she talked too jolly much!"

"I don't think they get on too well," said Ted. "I was in uncle's study once, when she came in. He received her very coolly.

"'You seem very busy, brother,' quoth my aunt.

"'And you help me!' growled Uncle Sam."

"Well, I like Aunt Maria," said little Arty. "She gave me half-a-crown once, on my birthday."

"You didn't return the compliment," said Ted. "Arty had a toy squirrel for Aunt Maria's birthday present, Bob. It had a yard measure cunningly concealed beneath its tail. He got so fascinated with it, that, when it came to the point, he couldn't part with it—not even for Aunt Maria!"

"Last time that Aunt Maria came to see us, her new hat got soaked with rain," said Tom, with an appreciative grin. "What an awful fuss she made about it—and she said the ostrich feathers in it were quite spoilt. I wonder," said Tom pensively,

"how ever the birds manage to keep their feathers from getting spoilt, when they run about in the rain!"

Robert remained with them for some little time. One day, he was absent at the town, on business, and Beatrice, going over to the house, found the old man sitting in his study near his writing-table, frowning heavily betwixt perplexity and misery.

"I've lost my pocket-book, containing bank notes of some value," he explained to her. "If I had taken down the numbers, I might have recovered them. I suspect my nephew, Beatrice—he's following in his father's footsteps, in spite of all my care. The call of the blood!" he added bitterly; "like father, like son. History will oft repeat itself. I will discard, although I will not punish him. No need of further proof!"

Then Beatrice knew he had been nursing in a soured heart, a bitter, silent enmity against his nephew, all these years.

"Child! how can I tell you the hard truth? That Robert's father was a scoundrel, and Robert is a thief!"

She was gazing at him with widely-opened eyes, and a look of growing, intense astonishment. Her long silence altogether puzzled him.

"I left my pocket-book upon this open desk,

and Robert was alone here in the room. When I returned, I found the desk was closed, and the pocket-book that contained the notes was gone. He was uncommonly keen to go to town to-day—no doubt that he might take away his ill-gotten gains!”

“There must be some mistake—the notes cannot be really gone. You have mislaid the pocket-book. It is not lost—you’ll find it yet!”

“I know that you are bound to feel for your old friend and playmate!”

Beatrice snatched away her hands from his as he would have taken them in pitying compassion to comfort her; and she stood facing him with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes.

“Have pity on me, Beatrice—my lot is already a bitter one. Don’t make it harder for me!”

She turned to him again, with flashing eyes.

“You were never fair to Robert,” she exclaimed. “I know the reason now! Do you imagine I could doubt him, even if things appear most black against him? Do you suppose that anything you could say would change my faith in him? Ah, no, a thousand times!”

She paused to look at him, but he did not reply; and Beatrice turned away and left the room.

Robert called on her that evening.

"Uncle James has banished me for ever from his home. He tells me that you know the reason why." Then, after a long pause: "You do not doubt me, Beatrice? You do not question me in any way?" he said, with a grave smile, as he intently watched her quiet face.

"Why should I insult you with a doubt?" she answered simply, raising her dark eyes to his with an expression of unwavering faith in him.

He gave her one quick look, then caught her hands in his exultantly.

"Now, here's a friend worth having, and worth suffering to prove! Ah, Beatrice, you trust me as I would be trusted—as I would trust you—unquestioningly!" he exclaimed, with deep emotion in his tones. "I leave my uncle's house to-night," he added presently.

"You will write me in your banishment?"

"Indeed I will, dear," he said earnestly.

A little later Robert said good-bye, and started on his journey. He was going to a quiet seaside place. After some weeks' silence, Beatrice received a letter from him. Mr. Wardell was predest when Tom handed it to her, and he recognised the writing. He said nothing at the moment, but next day approached the subject, when he met her on the street.

"You received a letter from Robert, and it seemed to cost you a great deal of thought and care."

The girl gazed at him wonderingly, without reply.

"Beatrice," he said anxiously, "has Robert told you anything—has he confessed?"

She shook her head. "Nothing about the notes. What could there be to say?"

Mr. Wardell was greatly agitated. "I could find it in my heart to forgive him, if he would confess. What does it mean?" he muttered to himself, dissatisfied, when Beatrice had left him. "I fear Beatrice has some secret she is keeping from me. After the arrival of this letter, there was suppressed excitement in her face. I do not like this state of matters. I begin to think there is some mystery here!"

"Beatrice, I have seen the woman again of whom I told you," Robert wrote from his retreat. "I had been here for some few days when a hopeless-looking wreck of a man crossed my path by chance—or fate. He was leaning against a wall, apparently unable to move without assistance, and evidently suffering. A storm was threatening, and I took his arm, offering to see him home. He gave me his address, and we set off together, till we came

to a small cottage facing the sea. Its solitary inmate heard the gate click as we entered the small garden, and opened the door for us. Beatrice! I saw before me the woman I had met before. She looked at me with rapt surprise, and something else. I know not what, that drew my heart from me. One quick, apprehensive glance she gave my companion, as I led him in. We placed him on a sofa near the fire. As I turned to depart, he begged me to come again. It was now raining heavily, and the woman followed me to the door, begging me to wait awhile for shelter from the storm. I have often been there since. Their name is Blake, and they stay here for his health, which is precarious. Poor Blake has come to trust, depend on me."

"I have important tidings," wrote Robert, later on. "One day, as I approached the open door unnoticed, I overheard them talking earnestly together.

" 'He must not come here any more,' said Mrs. Blake, as I drew near.

" 'You always thwart me!' he said angrily. 'His visits are my only happiness, my only consolation, Marie, in my miserable life.'

"I saw her touch his arm reproachfully, and he stopped short, flushing up as though with some consuming, sudden shame.

“ ‘Forgive me, Marie—you have been an angel to a broken, miserable man!’

“ ‘She gave him a compassionate and sorrow-stricken look, and answered softly:

“ ‘It might offend his uncle. And it might injure him in life, if he comes here.’

“ ‘What can these people know about me, or my uncle, Beatrice?

“ ‘I slipped quietly away in my embarrassment, unwilling to disturb them, and unwilling to hear more.’”

A little later:—“ ‘Blake has been extremely ill,’” he wrote, “ ‘and has been asking constantly for me. I have overheard them talking in low tones about me, once again.

“ ‘Dear,’ she uttered softly, ‘we must forego this happiness, indeed—for we have forfeited all right to it.’

“ ‘You give no reason,’ he said fretfully.

“ ‘He must not come—because he is our son.’

“ ‘Our son!’ the sick man cried, as though he started up from his reclining posture.

“ ‘She seemed to soothe him, and to lay him back again amongst his pillows. She spoke earnestly to him, in murmuring, low tones, words that I did not hear. Once or twice he groaned, as though with deadly pain.

“ ‘You are always right,’ he said at last, in a heart-broken way. ‘The only reparation I can make you, my poor Marie, is to die—I wish death would come quicker, for your sake—I don’t die fast enough. I stand between you and the boy,’ he said remorsefully.

“ ‘Hush!’ she answered quickly, as though deeply wounded at his gloomy and despondent mood.

“ ‘I made a slight noise at the door, that Mrs. Blake might know I had arrived. Her husband was alone, and brooding deeply, as I entered. Mrs. Blake had left the room. When she came back, she told me very gently, very gratefully, I must not come again. I asked no reason, and she offered none. I mentioned, incidentally, that I had left my uncle’s home for good, and that I stood alone. When I said, afterwards, that I would come again, she answered nothing; asked no question, and made no comment. But her head was turned away from me, and I could see that she was quivering from head to foot.

“ ‘It had been a shock, a blow to me, when I heard her call me ‘son.’ I had so long believed myself to be the early-orphaned child of Uncle James’s brother. This poor, broken wreck my father? Can this statement be relied on? Have I made some mistake?

Yet I am certain that I heard aright, and I believe it. Beatrice—I feel it must be true.

“I feel intensely grieved for Blake. As for Mrs. Blake, I have already learnt to heartily esteem, as I’ve already loved her, in my heart. For her I feel an infinite tenderness, an infinite compassion, though I know not her story yet.”

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This letter of Robert’s had not yet reached Beatrice, when, one night, a frail and trembling form crept feebly forth alone into the cottage garden. The stars shone up above him, and the cool night air, caressing his fevered cheek, seemed to comfort, calm, and welcome him to the loving arms of Nature, loyal mother of us all; aye, even of the lost, forsaken outcast, when he has no other friend.

Thus he passed from the life that she, in pitiful compassion and staunch loyalty, had sought to share with him.

He was soon on the road that led to the railway station. For a time, he walked along it with a feverish, uncertain strength. Partial delirium had given him a momentary power to carry out the fixed idea he had for many hours been brooding on. Then he gradually seemed to lose account of time and

place, and to fall into a dream; though still his purpose stood before him hazily.

How long the way seemed now. How tired he was. His brain was not quite clear. His memory seemed gone. He began to wonder vaguely if he could be on the right track. How long he had been walking—surely yonder lights should be the distant station lights, in view at last.

He had somehow lost his bundle. He was sure he had it when he started from the cottage. He had not noticed that he had lost it by the way. He could not turn back again to find it now.

Where was he now? This could not be the road that he had meant to take. Here was the sea again, near his own home! Had he been wandering round upon the track, as lost men do, and so unknowingly retraced his weary and belated steps?

A new idea came to him, and took possession of his dreamy mind. This dark water stretching far away before him into distance was surely the River of Death—at last his time was come! He looked down upon the cold, dark water without shudder or repugnance; he must cross it, to reach the other side—the other side, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest!

Look yonder! See the faint light on the line

of the horizon, where the water meets the sky—there, surely, is the unknown country from whose bourne no traveller returns! There, surely, is the longed-for haven of his rest! And the friendly stars are shining overhead.

Every moment, it is growing brighter in the distance. Oh! he must make haste! And Marie?—was not this the best and sweetest reparation he could make his wife?

He stumbled to the edge of the shore, and slowly waded in. How cold and dark the water was! Was this the bitterness, the first sharp taste of death? Slipping suddenly, he lost his footing, and went in beyond his depth. There was a strong outgoing tide, and a deep undercurrent flowing. The tired man scarcely struggled—yielded gently to the motion of the water, as it drew him under, and away with it.

Instinctively, he had held his breath as he fell in. He rose to the surface, and then sank again. This time he tried to breathe, and the water gurgled gently at his lips. He held his breath, and closed them once again.

He rose again, then sank—the water gurgled gently at his lips. A thousand sweet bells were ringing in his ears—could these be his and Marie's wedding bells? Ah! how happy he had been. Be-

fore him, he saw pass in swift review, pass swiftly, though it was as an eternity to him, the early years that they had been together, he and his loyal wife. Marie as a toddling baby, clinging to his hand, and he a sturdy boy; Marie as a bright-faced, winsome girl; Marie as a noble-hearted woman, with his young son in her arms. But never Marie, pale and sad-faced, at the last! All that was faded now; passed away, together with his trouble and his sin.

The thousand musical, sweet bells were now no longer ringing in his ears. In his last consciousness, he saw the stars shine dimly through the water in the heavens above. He felt the soft and loving arms of the slow-swinging tide, as it drew him home, rock gently—gently rocking him to rest. And ever, up above, the stars were shining.

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“All is over, Beatrice,” wrote Robert. “Mr. Blake was, as I told you, very ill. We think he wandered out in his delirium, whilst his wife, worn-out with watching, slept at her post beside his bed. And he was apparently drowned in the sea. I have learnt the whole sad story from my mother’s lips. She broke down at the last, and, weeping in my arms, confessed the truth to me.

“My father forged a cheque upon her brother for a large sum, and, cashing it, fled to America. My father, repenting, coming home a dying wreck, sought my mother out. Uncle James had spared him for my mother’s sake, but he had banished her from his own life. He offered to educate and provide for me, on the sole condition that she relinquished all her rights in me. I was to take his name, believe myself an orphan and dependent on himself. She had consented to these terms for my own sake; only seeing me as a stranger, at a distance.”

On the morning of the arrival of Robert’s final letter to Beatrice, Mr. Wardell was standing at the wardrobe in his dressing-room, his old, warm morning-jacket in one hand, an old, worn pocket-book, with an elastic band confining bulky notes, held in the other, and an expression of dismay and sorrow in his face.

Well, at all events, he had had good ground for his distrust of Robert in what had gone before. And how proudly Robert had left him, and how silently! He thought again of the young nephew, whom he had sent to a far-distant school, seldom having him at home in the holidays, and never going to see him; for he could not bear the sight of this reminder of his constant grief. Then Robert

completed his course of study, and he had begun to consider his profession, and had allowed him ample means, but expressed no wish to see him at his home, till the young man conceived the natural desire to visit him, and followed up the impulse of his own accord. Well, he had done his duty by the boy, though Robert was Blake's son!

He wondered afresh what had become of Blake. He had not heard of him in all these years since Marie left him. Ah! with what strangely-mingled feelings of relief and pain he had heard that she was dead.

Mr. Wardell left his dressing-room, sighing heavily; old, sad memories and bitter recollections mingling with remorse, and gnawing at his heart, as he went towards the private gate opening into Mrs. Hayward's garden. He saw Beatrice in the distance, beneath a laden apple tree, the children round her, watching with keen interest as Teddy, on a ladder, shook down the ripe fruit. She turned her face to Mr. Wardell as he drew near, and hurried to his side. Her apronful of apples fell neglected to the ground. The unruly little flock of children instantly pounced upon the fruit, rushing off with screams of joy from possible pursuit.

"Have you heard from Robert?" asked Beatrice hurriedly, an excited note in her soft voice.

"I've found the notes, Beatrice," said Mr. Wardell.

Her mind was full of her own thoughts, and, though she heard, she scarcely answered him.

"You've not heard from Robert?" she repeated in an anxious fashion. "If you had, you would not take that tone. There are more serious matters now afoot, than even the loss or restoration of the notes!"

"I'm telling you that I have actually found them, Beatrice. The pocket-book fell out this morning from the torn lining of a pocket in my old morning-coat. I had it on that day, and have not worn it since. I must have put it in my pocket hurriedly when I was called away. I was so certain I had left it on my writing-table. Had I but trusted Robert as you did," he said remorsefully, "despite the seeming proofs of guilt. I regret, too late, the insult and injustice offered to my unoffending nephew."

"Ah! you had, indeed, no faith in him from earliest times. And when you sent him from you, Robert left you in unbroken silence, for he was too proud to palter to your petty jealousy of power, and your unfounded distrust of him."

"Not unfounded, child—be just to me—the notes seemed lost, indeed!"

"I have not forgotten that," said Beatrice. "But there are other matters. I have learnt the truth about the past. Tell me, were you never hard upon your sister?"

"You've heard of her? How is this possible? But, still, I say again, be just to me! It hurt me most to think that she I loved and trusted most should shield the doer of that deed. Refuse to give him up for me, her brother, and her lifelong friend. I would have given her the money freely, had she asked for it. I had never grudged my sister any help. It was the pain of being robbed behind my back when I was generous that cut me most."

"I've a letter from your nephew," answered Beatrice. "Robert has found his parents. He is coming home to ask your pardon for his father, for his mother's sake."

She drew the letter forth, presenting it to him. He tore it open hastily, with a contracted brow.

"I cannot pardon Blake!" he exclaimed with agitation. "And Marie's dead."

"Hush—you don't know what you say. You'll forgive him now, for he is dead," she added soberly. "Listen to me; he was very ill; they think he wandered out at night in his delirium, and that he got

drowned in the sea. Robert is bringing home his mother, whom you thought dead long ago."

The old man heard her in amaze and suffering. He still held the open letter in his hand, and he now read it through. He was leaning back against the gnarled trunk of an apple tree, his trembling right hand grasping a rugged bough for his support, the other clutching wildly at his heart. His face was troubled and amazed.

"The wasted years," he muttered brokenly. "The wasted years of bitterness to me, of suffering to Marie, through my cruel neglect of my unhappy sister. And Marie is still living, and is coming back to me! Child, I will indeed forgive the dead, though he has cost me these long years of pain and bitterness; and now—a late remorse!"

He turned away from her, and, leaning both his arms against the gnarled old trunk, he bowed his head on them. Beatrice cast one pitying, tender look at him, and went silently away.

FINIS

